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THE SOCIAL LIVES OF MEDIEVAL RINGS

Edited by
JITSKE JASPERSE

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PREFACE

WHILE ITS LIFE is not nearly as long and exciting as that of many medieval rings, the making of this edited volume certainly went through different stages. My fascination for rings began when I studied the seal matrix of Isabel of Hainaut (d. 1190), queen of France. When, in 1858, the French architect Viollet-le-Duc undertook excavations in the choir of the Notre-Dame, where Isabel had been buried, he found in her lead coffin a gold ring with a small stone (found near the left hand), a silver roundel, engraved with a lamb carrying a cross and inscribed AGNUS DEI (placed near the queen's chest area), and a silver seal 8.5 cm long by 5.5 cm wide, with a loop at the top. In 1860, seal, ring, and Agnus Dei roundel were stolen from the cathedral's treasury. Fortunately, the seal matrix surfaced and was acquired for the British Museum, but the whereabouts of the ring and roundel are still unknown. While the seal matrix has received ample attention, that it belonged to an assemblage of smaller artifacts remained unaddressed. Clearly, the ring—as well as seal and roundel—held some kind of meaning for Isabel and/or the ones burying her. Perhaps because of its simplicity—suggested by the description—I have always wondered whether the ring may have been a protective amulet rather than an expression of royal status. While the buried items remain enigmatic, they did animate my scholarly taste for rings and the sensory stimulation offered by small objects. This inspired collaboration with the archaeologist Karen Dempsey, who brought me on the path of the work done by her colleague Eleanor Standley. I was fortunate that Eleanor accepted an invitation to the panel "The Rich Lives of Medieval Rings," which I organized at the International Medieval Congress Leeds in 2022, and to which Elizabeth Dospěl Williams and Amanda Dotseth also contributed. Their excellent work encouraged me to further pursue the present volume.

The research on rings would have been impossible without libraries and museums. My gratitude goes to all of them, with a special mention of the Jacob-und-Wilhelm-Grimm-Zentrum at the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and Biblioteca Tomás Navarro Tomás at the Centro de Ciencias Humanidades y Sociales, CSIC (two institutional libraries I regularly visited in preparation of this volume), and the fabulous Museo Arqueológico Nacional in Madrid, where Helena Lahoz Kopiske provided me with access to the sapphire ring

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that features on this volume's cover. Holding a piece of the medieval world in your hand is something magical.

I want to thank all the authors who have contributed to this volume. I am grateful that they accepted my invitation, as I have learned so much more about the social lives of medieval rings after reading their chapters. Special thanks are owed to the team of Les Enluminures (Jacky Yao in particular) and Sandra Hindman (the queen of rings), who not only brings to life rings' fascinating past, but also generously agreed to write the Epilogue to this volume. The careful reader will see references to her publications in numerous chapters within this volume. I am immensely grateful to my former intern Su'aad Redan (Art History, University of Amsterdam), whose lively discussions about rings and gender, as well as her careful and in-depth reading of the contributions, and support with copy-editing enhanced the creation of the present volume. The anonymous peer reviewer's stimulating comments sweetened the final steps on the long road of publishing. Arc Humanities Press, with Laura Macy's critical eye and spot-on remarks, and Tania Colwell's organizational talent and incredible patience, has been supportive along the way.

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Introduction

EXPLORING THE SOCIAL LIVES OF RINGS

MOTION, GENDER, AND PRESERVATION

JITSKE JASPERSE

WHEN ON MARCH 13, 1940, construction work was carried out in Calle de la Merced 27—located in the former Jewish quarter—in Pamplona (Navarre), workmen discovered a hoard of 117 gold coins, two embroidered purses, and one gold ring set with a large sapphire. A year later these pieces arrived at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional (MAN) in Madrid, where today a selection of the find is on display in the medieval section: circa 80 coins, the ring, and one of the embroidered purses (Figure 0.1.).[1] In scholarship, the coins, of which 90 florins were minted in Aragon during the reign of Pedro IV (1335–1387), have received the most attention. Based on the identification of their issuing authorities, the hoard can be dated around 1400. The combination of coins struck in different regions also gives us an idea about the circulation of money in Navarre as well as its political and economic connectedness with Castile, France, and Italy.[2] Whoever owned the coins and one lone ring gathered the gold valuables in two small bags before safely putting them away.

1 The ring is Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional (MAN), inv. 63601; one of the purses is MAN, inv. 65440; and the coins are catalogued individually inv. 105302; inv. 106031 to 106158. See https://ceres.mcu.es/pages/ResultSearch?txtSimpleSearch=Tesoro%20de%20Pamplona&simpleSearch=0&hipertextSearch=1&search=simpleSelection&MuseumsSearch=MAN%7C&MuseumsRolSearch=9&listaMuseos=[Museo%20Arqueol%F3gico%20Nacional]. It is impossible to say whether all found objects were actually handed over to the museum, or that the items at the MAN are only a fragment of what was originally unearthed.

2 Ibáñez Artica, "Circulación de moneda foránea," 247–59; Ibáñez Artica, "El tesoro de la calle de la Merced de Pamplona."

JITSKE JASPERSE is Ramón y Cajal Researcher at the Institute of History, Spanish National Research Council, Madrid. She has published on medieval material culture and gender, and addresses how and why people engage with artifacts. Heartfelt thanks are owed to Su'aad Redan, Danna Messer, and Therese Martin for a critical reading of this chapter, as well as to Esperanza Alfonso for her suggestions.

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Figure 0.1. Pamplona Hoard as exhibited in room 27 at the Museo Arqueológico Nacional, Madrid. Photo by author.

Figure 0.2. Purse, fourteenth century. White linen embroidered with silk, h. 16 × w. 18 cm. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, inv. 65440. Photo by Raúl Fernández Ruiz. Used with permission.

Figure 0.3. Ring, fourteenth century. Gold and sapphire, h. 3.10 cm; diameter 2.20 cm. Madrid, Museo Arqueológico Nacional, inv. 63601. Photos by Raúl Fernández Ruiz. Used with permission.

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The purse shown in Figure 0.2 (h. 16 × w. 18 cm)—the most eye-catching of the two—is lined with white linen fabric and embellished with a wave-like embroidered pattern in white, which is combined with geometrical patterns consisting of stars, shields, and squares in red, black, and yellow silk.[3] Based on its workmanship, the bag is attributed to a Nasrid workshop in Granada. While much of the embroidery has been damaged and its colours have faded, it is not difficult to imagine it once was a splendid purse.

But what about the ring (Figure 0.3)?[4] Amidst the numerous coins, the sole ring from Pamplona manages to catch our eye not only because it is clearly not a coin, but also because of its fine ornamented hoop (measuring 2.20 cm in diameter), which is made of a flat gold band engraved with the kind of geometrical patterns also found in late medieval illuminated manuscripts, which corroborates the dating of the ring in the fourteenth century.[5] The shoulders of the hoop are decorated with two animal heads, whose eyes are indicated by pierced holes, flanked by elegant leaves that resemble wings. From the animals' beaks emerge "tongues," which are actually the outer ends of the flat band that truly buttress the fat gold bezel. The bezel consists of an upper and lower part that were soldered together and decorated with a dented edge. It is set with a bright blue irregularly shaped bulky cabochon stone, a sapphire, kept in place with four claws. The axis of the sapphire has been pierced, which led María Luisa Galván to suggest that the stone was used as a pendant before it was set in a bezel.[6] In an earlier life, the sapphire perhaps was part of an earring or necklace, of which multiple examples from the Roman and Byzantine world survive. But it is equally thinkable that the stone adorned votive objects, such as the crown of the Visigothic King Recesvinto that is part of the treasury of Guarrazar, which contains an impressive number of 243 sapphires.[7] First-hand observation of the ring at the museum revealed little traces of wear, which is perhaps not so surprising for an object made in the fourteenth century and ready to be hoarded around 1400.

3 A detailed description of the purse can be found in Galván Cabrerizo, "Bolsa o escarcela del siglo XIII," 175–77, where the second bag is described as made of a thick white linen with crude embroidery in red silk. See also Franco, "Panorama del románico español," 249.

4 Ring, h. 3.10 cm; diam. 2.20 cm. Bezel, w. 1.20 cm; d. 1.20 cm; l. 1.60 cm; h. 1.50 cm.

5 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 205–6.

6 Galván Cabrerizo, "Anillo de oro," 177–78.

7 MAN, inv. 71202; Cózar Cuello and Sapalski Rosellóski, "Estudio de las gemas," 83.

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The Pamplona ring is known to us foremost through its display at the MAN and its record in the online museum's database CERES.[8] Even though the visual energy of medieval rings radiates through museum displays, heritage databases, and auction catalogues, it is, in fact, easy to overlook these small items in favour of larger artifacts about which we think to know more. Some rings have escaped attention due to their very simple designs when compared with stunning counterparts, such as architectural rings for which multiple elements were soldered together to create a rich, micro-architectural form sometimes topped with a colourful stone.[9] This, together with their manufacture in larger quantities and similar styles,[10] the frequent absence of traces of medieval ownership, and their unknown object histories in general, explains why rings are demanding artifacts to study.[11] It is true that they have long been collectables, but their study by medievalists is hampered by the factors mentioned above.[12] Nonetheless, the lavish publications on rings under the direction of Sandra Hindman, owner of Enluminures (a gallery specialized in the sale of rings and jewellery as well as medieval manuscripts) and a leading expert when it comes to medieval rings, testify to the appeal and relevance of these usually diminutive artifacts.[13] Recent articles discuss medieval rings as embodiments of status, power, and religious affiliations, as well as expressions of personal devotion and healthcare, thus showcasing rings as vehicles for self-representation.[14]

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8 The ring is likely to garner more attention after the forthcoming article coordinated by Helena Lahoz Kopiske, curator at the MAN.

9 For examples, see Hindman et al., *Toward an Art History of Medieval Rings*, cat. nos. 13, 14, and 15.

10 That they could be produced and made accessible in large quantities is indicated by the ring-savvy Henry III, who gave away 2,769 rings between 1245 and 1252; see Carpenter, *Henry III*, 395.

11 The challenges when studying rings have also been pointed out by Moreira, "Rings on her Fingers," 306–8; and see also Chapter 2 in this volume.

12 On collectors, see Scarisbrick, "Introduction: Collecting Rings," 13–23; and also The Epilogue to this volume.

13 Hindman and Miller, *Take This Ring*; Hindman, *The Fashioned Hand*; Hindman et al., *Toward an Art History of Medieval Rings*; Hindman and Scarisbrick, *Golden Marvels of Byzantium*; Scarisbrick, *Historic Rings*.

14 Renou, "Rings of Power," 13–29; Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 303–36; Kennedy, "English Iconographic Rings," 80–100; Hindman, "Medieval Iconographic Rings," 485–502; Evangelatou-Notara and Mavrommati, "*Not Even a Band on My Finger*?" 45–62.

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The brief presentation of both the Pamplona ring and hoard might be understood as a clear-cut story about the hoarding and finding of a costly ring, its place in a society that valued jewellery, and its arrival at a museum. Yet, a much more intricate story can be told if we understand the Pamplona ring as a node in a web of social connections. Within this web, the ring moved as it was made, sold or gifted, and owned. Perhaps it was also worn (even if just for a short time) before its arrival in Calle de la Merced, where it was subsequently stored in purses. After its recovery centuries later, it became part of a highly curated presentation at the MAN. In sum, the ring has a social life; a theme that I will excavate more fully in this opening chapter. It is the focus on the social aspects related to medieval finger rings that unites the contributions of nine scholars with backgrounds in art history, history, archaeology, museum studies, and collecting. Together their contributions cover material roughly ranging from 1100–1500 in Iberia, France, England, Germany, Rus, and Byzantium.

Social Lives

The "social lives" in this book's title is inspired by the first part of the title of Arjun Appadurai's famous edited volume, *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective* (first published in 1986) in which he argues that "commodities, like persons, have social lives."[15] Appadurai and the authors of his volume investigate how things—including medieval relics—"circulate in different regimes of value."[16] The author points out that objects receive their economic and cultural worth not merely because of their raw materials, processes of manufacture and labour, or a neutral market, but because of the significance people attach to them depending on their social and cultural contexts. And since these can vary, the worth of things can change at different points during their lives.

For rings, this has been poignantly discussed by Julie Renou, who emphasized that the value of early medieval rings fluctuates "depending on its social framework of appraisal."[17] In her insightful analysis of the normative scholarly framework often applied to the study of rings, Renou argues that rather than focusing on material worth, we should also consider craftsmanship, the distances material travelled (that is, the econom-

15 Appadurai, "Introduction," 3

16 Appadurai, "Introduction," 4.

17 Renou, "Rings of Power," 15.

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ics of import), as well as moments of display and traces of wear, tear, and repair. By taking such aspects into account the meaning of rings can shift from economic valuables to agents in the creation and maintenance of hierarchical relationships.[18] The social lives of rings can be further investigated when scholars bring them into dialogue with other artifacts, such as sculpture, paintings, and coins.[19] This furnishes insights in the artistic, social, and religious *milieux* (or regimes of value) rings were part of and that help us to understand why rings mattered. Hindman, for instance, has shown that when rings with representations of saints (also called iconographic rings) are studied together with devotional manuscripts, we can grasp these small adornments as wearable prayers. Wearing them "transformed prayer into an activity that punctuated every moment of daily life anywhere."[20]

Where Appadurai is interested in a social history of commodities with its strong emphasis on demand and value and its focus on long-term shifts and larger-scale social dynamics, most contributors to the current volume deal with a specific item or multiple rings, or discuss rings in a variety of textual sources (including wills, inventories, literary narrations, and scholastic treatises) related to a specific place and time. Rarely do they discuss rings as commodities, although these items certainly were part of regimes of circulation and exchange. Instead, the contributors focus on rings as small objects that have touched upon people, places, and events, and that featured in theological debates, and which have formed our modern museum collections. This means they were active things that embodied gendered, religious, and class identities and forged worldly and spiritual connections, perhaps even evoking multi-sensory experiences through descriptions in written sources and display at public events. That is, rings are material and narrative actants that give life to events and stories.[21]

In the remainder of this chapter I want to highlight three aspects that give shape to the social lives of rings and deserve closer scrutiny: material and motion; status and gender; and safekeeping and presentation. Taking the Pamplona ring as my guide, I bring my observations in conversation with the contributions of the authors, who interrogate rings in various ways. The plural "lives" here is purposely chosen to underscore that

18 Renou, "Rings of Power," 22.

19 Hindman et al., *Toward an Art History of Medieval Rings*.

20 Hindman, "Medieval Iconographic Rings," 501.

21 On the agency of rings, see also Bildhauer, *Medieval Things*, ch. 4.

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rings as a category have different object trajectories, but also that just one ring can hold multiple lives, depending on its moments of activity, immobilization, retrieval, and display. Considering diverse moments within an object's life also inspires us to think about the question Renou posed of rings, namely how people live and engage with rings, which includes a consideration of the gestures connected with rings and the awareness of wearing a ring or multiple rings.[22] To some, "life" may suggest the kind of object biography as applied by Igor Kopytoff, who puts forward that a cultural biography of things not only includes commoditization (resulting in "an item with use value that also has exchange value"),[23] but also singularization so that things become non-commodities. This singularization can happen when items become heirlooms, regalia used in rituals, or cultural heritage.[24] In this volume, singularization is a reccurring theme. To give just three examples: Inés Calderón (Chapter 3) finds medieval stipulations that rings of virtue are not to be sold or passed on because of their saintly, healing, or magical properties. Therese Martin (Chapter 7) details how bishops' rings turned into relics. And Elizabeth McCord (Chapter 8) discusses Byzantine marriage rings as twentieth-century commodities that become collectables gifted to a museum, where they turn into objects of study and preservation. In a critical response to Kopytoff's concept of biography, Rosemary Joyce and Susan Gillespie have pointed out that this metaphor implies that "bodily integrity is essential for the continuity of existence."[25] The reality of many artifacts—rings included—is, however, that they are broken or have been transformed, or that their trajectories are incomplete (or at least not completely known to us). For this reason, Joyce and Gillespie suggest speaking about object itineraries. However, by using the plural "lives," I acknowledge rings as active agents in motion, while also allowing the authors to focus on specific aspects of a ring's itinerary without detailing it in the fullest possible way.[26]

22 Renou, "Rings of Power," 18.

23 Kopytoff, "Cultural Biography of Things," 64.

24 On regalia, see also Holcomb, "The Adorned Body," 22–23.

25 Joyce and Gillespie, "Making Things out of Objects that Move," 11.

26 On the movement of medieval artifacts, see also Hamilton and Proctor-Tiffany, *Moving Women, Moving Objects*.

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Material and Motion

Before ending up in anyone's possession, the Pamplona ring had to be manufactured. Its gold and sapphire may have been hailed from Sri Lanka and arrived in Europe via long-distance travel and trade in which the Mediterranean functioned as an important commercial centre from where goods were stored, traded, and exported. Where the ring was made we cannot say, because the method of making and its design are too general to be pinpointed to a specific area.[27] So, rings and the raw materials they were made of were part of the process of commoditization. Like our Pamplona ring, many others were further embellished with precious or glass stones, gems, pearls, and enamel.[28] The way these were set onto their hoops, together with the decoration of the hoops and bezels, determined rings' visual appearance, appeal, and wearability.

Precious stones added a specific lure, which made rings singular things—to use Kopytoff's framework—rather than commodities.[29] According to Marbode of Rennes's *De lapidibus* ("On Stones," ca. 1090), sapphires were considered only "for the fingers of kings to wear."[30] The French inventories studied by Mariah Proctor-Tiffany in Chapter 1 of this volume and the documents connected with the Iberian nobility analyzed by Inés Calderón in Chapter 3, speak volumes of the elite character of sapphires. At times, these written sources mention that rings were cherished and donated because of the protective and healing qualities their stones held; virtues already advertized by Marbode, who wrote that sapphires preserve health and disarm treachery.[31]

27 On the method of working with gems, see Campell, "Gold, Silver, and Precious Stones," 135–37.

28 Not all rings were made of metal, see Chapter 2 in this volume. An interesting category is the straw ring, which was not meant to last, as has been pointed out by Judith Bennett, Ruth Karras, and Janelle Werner in their analysis of what courtship in medieval England could entail. Straw rings were made to adorn the fingers of young women to suggest a marital bond. Not only was such a ring quickly made without any expense, it could also be easily torn or simply disintegrate so that any sign of the marital bond disappeared. The social life of these rings came to a quick end, sometimes destroying the personal lives of the women who once wore them. See Bennett et al., "No Romance Without Finance," 79.

29 On the process of singularization, see Kopytoff, "Cultural Biography of Things," 73–83.

30 Marbode of Rennes, *De lapidibus*, 42.

31 For a discussion of virtues connected with stones set in rings, see also Speakman, "Pearls, Sapphires, Diamonds & Toadstones."

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It is no wonder, then, that people were keen to add such powerful stones to their rings.

The philosopher-sociologist Georg Simmel pointed out that the social purpose of jewellery's material is its brilliance, which makes the wearer appear "as the center of a circle of radiation in which every close-by person, every seeing eye, is caught." [32] However, in her glowing analysis of stones in medieval secular culture, Brigitte Buettner explains that the attraction of what she labels "minerals" lays not just in visual or economic appeal, but also in their ability as actants to set things into motion.[33] The virtues of stones set in glistening metals went beyond the visual, as they seems to have been rubbed, turned, and tasted by their wearers.[34] Physical engagement with stones is also emphasized by Marbode, and in the *Lapidary of King Alfonso X* (ca. 1283) we find multiple references to touch, which also include digestion. For example, the stone called "mover has this name because when it is polished and the powder that it gives off is given to a pregnant woman in a drink, it will move the baby and push it, be it dead or alive."[35] This stone, like many others in the lapidary, cannot be identified and might well be a mixture of minerals.[36] While the swallowing of stone particles may not have been a likely use of rings set with stones, licking or rubbing them possibly was. In fact, in this volume Therese Martin narrates the interactive use of "miracle rings" at the monastery of Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil in the seventeenth century. The rings were carried to the sick, who put them on, touched them, or washed them by pouring water through them for the effects of healing. Due to their small size, rings could be easily and inconspicuously transported to offer aid where needed. Their portability becomes abundantly clear when turning to a late medieval piece of paper to which a simple ring (1.5 cm in diameter) is stitched at the bottom. The unknown sender of the letter written in German informs his noble lady (also unknown) that he delivers to her a small ring (*ein cleins ringlein*) with which he has touched several holy places connected with the Holy Sepulchre he visited. As Folker Reichert has pointed out, this little gift held little material value, but was imbued with great spiritual worth.[37]

32 Simmel, "Secrecy and Adornment," 342.

33 Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 6, 73–81, esp. 77; also Barthes, "From Gemstones to Jewellery," 60.

34 Bildhauer, *Medieval Things*, 138.

35 *Lapidary of King Alfonso X*, 27. For stones in connection with pregnancy and childbirth, see also two examples mentioned in Lightbown, *Mediaeval European Jewellery*, 98.

36 *Lapidary of King Alfonso X*, 17.

37 Reichert, "Ein cleins ringlein," 609. I owe this fascinating ring reference to the

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The simple metal ring had become a contact relic in which the power of the holy places was preserved. Through sight and touch, the female recipient of the ring could visit the holy sites in her mind's eye. So, contrary to what Simmel proposed, rings and other adornments were not merely designed for others to see, or be enjoyed by the wearer foremost through the eyes of the beholder.[38] Instead, rings forged more intimate connections between themselves and their wearers, being both observed up close and manipulated by the hands of their wearers to invite further appreciation. In this volume, this is analyzed in more detail by Proctor-Tiffany, who speaks of rings' haptic histories when she traces the gifting of rings, that is, their movements from one hand to the next. These rings in motion were literally touched, and this sensory experience stimulated the creation of additional layers of meaning preserved within the gifted object.

Rings directed gestures of the hand and articulated the motion of the fingers they adorned.[39] In medieval Germany before the fourteenth century, rings' attachment to the finger is indicated by the word *vingerlîn*, the diminutive of finger, rather than *rinc* (or *ringlein* used in the letter mentioned above).[40] Recent reflections on the sensory experiences of wearing jewellery encourages us to think more about how individual items of adornment are both moveable and touchable objects.[41] Ideas on jewellery and movement had been formulated earlier by the architect and architectural historian Gottfried Semper (d. 1879), who in 1856 theorized that bodily adornments are shaped according to the laws of nature. His analysis of what he called the formal qualities of jewellery ("Schmuck" in German) is based on his architectural vision that bodies, like buildings, should be adorned in a harmonious way in order to convey their balanced character. To this end, he created three categories of adornment, of which *Ringschmuck* is one.[42] This encircling type of jewellery is directly connected to the body part it adorns and is meant to enhance form and proportion.[43] According to Semper, crowns, girdles, and necklaces belong to the most elevated adornments. Finger rings,

peer reviewer. For an image of the letter and ring, see www.flickr.com/photos/stadtmuseum/6666463513/, accessed February 4, 2025.

38 Hannah Korn speaks of dual accessibility, see Korn, "Arms and Hands," 51–55, at 51.

39 Holcomb, "The Adorned Body," 17.

40 Bildhauer, *Medieval Things*, 132.

41 Williams, "Appealing to the Senses," 77–96; Holcomb, *Jewelry: The Body Transformed*.

42 The other two categories are hanging jewellery ("der Behang") and directional jewellery ("der Richtungsschmuck").

43 Semper, *Über die formelle Gesetzmäßigkeit des Schmuckes*, 15.

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Figure 0.4. Finger reliquary of St. James, twelfth–thirteenth century. Gold set with stones and enamelled medallion, ca. 13 cm. Eichstätt, Diözesanmuseum, inv. no. DK 11. Photo by Helmut Bauer. © Domschatz- und Diözesanmuseum Eichstätt.
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on the other hand, are aesthetically the least meaningful.[44] Semper writes that they do nothing to emphasize beautiful qualities, but are purely practical items functioning as signet rings or amulets. Here, I believe that Semper has not done justice to his own theory that encircling jewels literally encompass and thus empower a body part. After all, this encircling type of jewellery is directly connected to the body part it adorns and is meant to enhance form and proportion. A hand adorned with a ring, or multiple rings, attracts attention and gains gesticulating presence.

For example, the arm reliquary of St. Blaise, with its fingers seemingly frozen in blessing, is not the static object it appears to be. All fingers are adorned with a variety of rings; some small, some larger, some with a colourful stone, others with decorated hoops. The rings have been fixed to the fingers with tiny hooks so that they cannot slip off, an indicator of the performative use of the arm. During liturgical feast days the arm of Blaise was used to bless people, whose eyes must have gravitated towards the rings on the hand—which was closest to the recipient of the blessing. Set in motion in an ambience lit with candles, the stones glistened and further animated the fingers that were performing the gesture of blessing.[45]

The animating function of rings is highlighted even further in a somewhat uncanny reliquary in the shape of a slightly curved finger fully covered with gold filigree (Figure 0.4).[46] This small shrine made

44 Semper, *Über die formelle Gesetzmäßigkeit des Schmuckes*, 18.

45 The arm reliquary of St. Blaise is preserved at Braunschweig, Herzog Anton Ulrich-Museum, Germany, https://3landesmuseen-braunschweig.de/en/herzog-anton-ulrich-museum/collection/departments/medieval-arts.

46 On finger reliquaries, see Rückert, "Fingerreliquiar," cols. 1207–24. Here it is also mentioned that, when opened, the inscription on the door reads S.IĀC / fr̄. DN̄I

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in Italy in the twelfth or thirteenth century contains a relic of St. James (the brother of Christ), which is hidden behind a small door resembling the bezel of a ring set with an irregularly shaped blue stone.[47] In addition to this sizable ring, five differently shaped filigree bands decorated with red stones and a pearl also evoke rings. Unlike the rings of St. Blaise, here the rings were designed as an integral part of the finger that measures about 13 cm (including its base). Clearly, the patron and/or maker envisioned that the saint's bone deserved a decoration that would emphasize the "fingerness" of the reliquary. The effect is that the finger almost comes to life because the encircling ornamentation emphasizes its slight curve.

The reliquaries and extant rings themselves suggest that metal rings were created with the idea of longevity, but this was not necessarily so. As a commodity, metal itself could be reason to melt rings down, just as the sale of stones and pearls was cause to deconstruct them. These acts of dismantling are one of the reasons that explain—as both Therese Martin and Inés Calderón remark in their contributions to this volume—why many items mentioned in the written record cannot be connected with surviving rings. From items that once adorned moving fingers and bodies, rings changed into separate elements ready to be sold and remade into new jewellery. While their social value as rings may have come to a halt, the material elements that they originally were made of were passed on, creating new artifacts that would accumulate lives of their own.

Rings' ability to set things into motion—including devotion, healing, religious debates—depended not only on their materiality, but also on their portability.[48] Their movements are a reoccurring theme throughout this volume. Taking us from 2020 back to the tenth century, in Chapter 7 Therese Martin traces the history of four "miracle working" rings at Santo Estevo. While her questions evolve around the rings' authenticity and modern perceptions of what episcopal rings should look like, her chapter also provides insight as to how, throughout the centuries, the rings and saintly bones together were moved from one container to the next. In Chapter 3, Inés Calderón highlights the potential of these small adornments of the fingers to cross territorial boundaries that made up the Iberian world. By so doing,

(Sanctus Iacobus frater Domini). The door has been reinstalled upside down at some point.

47 Böhm, "H 54, Fingerreliquiar," 3:149–50.

48 Appadurai, "Introduction," 5, uses the phrase "things-in-motion"; see also Joyce and Gillespie, *Things in Motion*; Hamilton and Proctor-Tiffany, *Moving Women, Moving Objects*; Shalem, "Objects as Carriers," esp. 45–47 on rings.

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documented rings are material witnesses to the forging of dynastic and religious ties. And they are also indicators of portable wealth that allowed men and women to distribute their properties in targeted ways. Mariah Proctor-Tiffany, in Chapter 1, analyzes wills and testaments of French royalty that mention impressive numbers of rings, tracing the haptic itineraries of some rings in order to capture their affective and political potential. That rings indeed could be highly political and were therefore moved from one person to another is one of the aspects discussed by Ana Labarta in her analysis in Chapter 5 of signet rings (usually made of silver) in chronicles from al-Andalus. These sources demonstrate that the presentation of such rings to heirs was a crucial step in the transfer of legitimate authority to the new ruler. The political nature of such personal adornments was attested more dramatically when rings were removed from the hands of their former owners in order to exhibit they had died.

Like all medieval rings, the Pamplona ring's social life started with the metal it was wrought from and the methods and materials used to further embellish it. In this sense, medieval rings, like Pamplona's, were commodities responding to a demand that was either particular (unique pieces) or more general (rings produced in larger quantities). Yet an analysis of the cultural meaning attributed to materials, an understanding of rings as actants engaging with human bodies, and an acknowledgement of them as being moving participants in networks demonstrate that rings could be singularized. Depending on their histories—and what we are able to unearth about them—rings embodied political and affective relationships, emotions, health, and religious identities. At some point, different categories of value may have overlapped, but time could also erase former meanings as well as affix new ones to the social lives of rings.

Status and Gender

Rings as things in motion—which, despite an enigmatic trajectory, also includes our Pamplona ring—interacted with the categories of status and gender, which, too, were a part of rings' social lives. Here, I take Roland Barthes's essay "From Gemstones to Jewellery" (1961) as a starting point, because his reflections on gemstones and jewellery stimulate further thinking about status and gender. He states that modern jewels have a "next-to-nothing" character because they are made of fragile, soft, and inexpensive materials rather than heavy gemstones and true gold.[49] The use of cheaper

49 Barthes, "From Gemstones to Jewellery," 63.

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materials led to a democratization of jewellery, with "the copy … no longer a hypocritical way of being rich on the cheap—it is quite open about itself, makes no attempt to deceive, only retaining the aesthetic qualities of the material it is imitating."[50]

If we bring this observation to medieval rings, it is only fair to say that the use of less expensive materials is not limited to the modern period.[51] Archaeologists have done much to uncover how the non-elite adorned their bodies with rings made of base metals such as copper (the basic ingredient of bronze) and brass (an alloy of copper and zinc which has a gold-like appearance).[52] They have also warned against an understanding of non-precious materials as "cheap" and simple imitations, and therefore of lesser status (that is, until the 1950s and 1960s discussed by Barthes). Such rings do merit attention because, as Renou has already pointed out, they can reveal how materials were crafted and socially appreciated. In Chapter 2, Eleanor Standley examines a wide range of rings from the medieval and early modern period, each time with the understanding that, no matter what their material, these were personal items that could be imbued with different emotions, including humour.

Despite the important and exciting work done by archaeologists, art historians' eyes are more quickly caught by gold objects that do not tarnish than by stained and corroded metals, as is my own experience when studying rings at the MAN. The combination of some well-known rings set with precious stones—such as our Pamplona ring—and the mention of similar rings in romances, chronicles, and inventories of various sorts have shaped the idea that expensive or exclusive artifacts mattered the most. As a result, we have also come to expect that medieval secular and religious elites would only wear the most expensive and fancy stuff. The consequences of this assumption are investigated by Therese Martin in Chapter 7. Moreover, as Eleanor Standley observes here "museum collections are inherently varied and biased, whether due to the methods of recovery and personal interests of collectors, or to the collecting policies of the institutions" (p. 59). This has obscured our thinking about how medieval people may have appreciated coloured glass, painted stones, and base metalwork that sparkles like gold and silver do.

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50 Barthes, "From Gemstones to Jewellery," 62.

51 Craddock, "Metal," 371–91; Blair and Blair, "Copper Alloys," 81–106.

52 Willemsen, "'Man is a Sack of Muck girded with Silver,'" 171–202; Standley, "Love and Hope," 742–59; Evangelatou-Notara and Mavrommati, "*Not Even a Band on My Finger*?," 45–62.

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Returning to Barthes, in his reflections on the democratization of contemporary jewellery, he is less explicit whether this fashion detail was worn by both women and men. Medieval grave finds, chance finds, hoards, and documentary sources (sumptuary laws included) indicate that men and women—including children—from all walks of life adorned themselves. Because of rings' relatively small size, the wide range of materials available to make them—including organic stuff—and their symbolism as signs of friendship and commitment, rings were accessible and highly wearable items, even though working classes may not have worn them every day or wore simple, unadorned bands. But who wore the Pamplona ring? Clearly, the ring belongs to what Barthes categorized as gemstones, "which grew old and so were, despite everything, alive."[53] This kind of stone set in gold was an elite object that only from the seventeenth century onwards was relegated to the realm of women.[54]

Based on its materials, it likely was an affluent person, but the absence of an inscription indicating ownership or religious affiliation hinders a straightforward attribution. Nor does its diameter (2.2 cm) indicate whether its wearer was male or female. Not only because the size of fingers differs from person to person (also depending on age, medical status, temperature), but rings could also be worn on different fingers, which vary in size as well.[55] In her analysis of Merovingian rings, Isabel Moreira has pointed out that assuming gender based on size may result in faulty interpretations of monogram rings. Moreover, rings found in graves of which the sex of the skeleton has been established do not automatically indicate original ownership as they may have been presented to the deceased by a family member.[56] However, some rings that have the names of possible owners or wearers inscribed on them can actually tell us something about their gender as well as faith.

For example, in Chapter 5 Ana Labarta records the names of Sukayna and Shunayf on rings found in graves in al-Andalus. The combination of these names with the complete profession of faith inscribed on their rings suggests

53 Barthes, "From Gemstones to Jewellery," 59.

54 Barthes, "From Gemstones to Jewellery," 64.

55 I owe the ideas about age and medical status to Su'aad Redan. On women's economic status, see also Evangelatou-Notara and Mavrommati, "*Not Even a Band on My Finger*?," 45–62.

56 Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 307. The "gendered" challenges posed by Spanish Visigothic rings become apparent in Ballester, "El Chatón Visigótico de Eivina[s]," 51–81, esp. 73–74.

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that Sukayna and Shunayf desired to visually affirm their religious identity and show their piety. In a Christian context, rings found in tombs belonging to bishops, abbots, and abbesses also offer clues about their owners' gender, although the exact meaning of their rings deserves careful analysis. Some hoards with rings are more instructive, because they contain a variety of adornments that scholars have identified as female. This is also the case for a pair of signet rings discussed in Chapter 4 by Christian Raffensperger, who studies them as valuable sources for unravelling women's power in Rus. Even if the actual use of these rings cannot be established with certainty, just wearing them, and moving hands and fingers while doing so underscored the political and religious identities of their wearers. If we can imagine "fingerness" for reliquaries, surely we can envision how signet rings of the type must have elevated the performative actions of the elite Rus women who wore them

Yet, the gendered picture remains complex, especially when we include the passing on of rings as heirlooms, tokens of friendship, or diplomatic gifts between men and women—both religious and secular—at various points in their lives. An example of objects' movement between people is presented by the English gentlewoman Margaret Paston in a letter from 1441 to her husband, and in which an iconographic ring is mentioned: "I pray you that ye will wear the ring with the image of St. Margaret that I sent you for a remembrance till ye come home. Ye have left me such a remembrance that maketh me to think upon you both day and night when I would sleep."[57] Margaret was pregnant—the "remembrance" her husband left her—when sending her ring engraved with the patron saint of childbirth, who was popular with both women and men.[58] While it is tempting to attribute rings with female saints—like St. Margaret—to female owners, the reality of rings changing hands complicates such readings.[59] Moreover, the Paston letter beautifully shows the mobile and affective nature of jewellery. What at first glance appears to be a straightforward devotional female item based on size and saintly iconography, is an emotionally charged artifact, or what Eleanor Standley has called an "emotant," which, once gifted, receives additional layers of feelings (e.g., love, joy, hope, anxiety) and memories of people, places, and events.[60]

57 *The Paston Letters*, 5

58 Kennedy, "English Iconographic Rings," 89. See in this volume also Hindman, "Epilogue," 242.

59 I thank Su'aad Redan for discussing this with me.

60 Standley, "Love and Hope," 743, 745.

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Despite the rich evidence for women as owners, wearers, and donors of rings, we cannot deny that medieval men ruled the world of rings, whether as manufacturers, merchants, wearers, theologians, scholars, or collectors.[61] Mining chronicles and treatises for the existence and meaning of the signet ring in al-Andalus, Ana Labarta's chapter details that this type of ring clearly showed a man's religious affiliation and social status. How deeply the personal was entwined with the political is not only showcased by the bestowal of rings on male heirs, but also by the violent yet fascinating stories about the looting of rings from the fingers of their male owners to underscore the submission of the enemy and the triumph of the true ruler. Clearly, the men writing such narratives imprinted the use and meaning of signet rings in the hands of men on the minds of their readers.

In her discussion of bishops' rings in Chapter 6, Juliette Calvarin also places rings squarely in debates dominated by men. Different from Islamic thinkers who debated the material and design of rings, Christian intellectuals were concerned with what seal rings could signify when adorning the hands of bishops. Through complex metaphors, rings not just sealed church men as bishops, but also marked them as keepers and custodians of Christ's bride, the church. The mark left on the use and meaning of rings by scholastics also impacted the ordination of abbots and abbesses. Until the tenth century, pontificals record that both abbots and abbesses received ring, crozier, and monastic rule from the bishop when he ordained them. In the tenth century this changed: abbesses and abbots lost the ring, but where abbots still received the crozier, abbesses were given the rule only.[62] Katie Ann-Marie Bugyis has interpreted the loss of ring and crozier in the hands of the abbess in connection with gender and status. In order to distinguish abbots from bishops, the first were left with just the crozier (and not the ring) as visual and tangible sign of their authority. As a result, the importance of the staff in the (ringless) hands of the abbot was emphasized by no longer investing the abbess with a crozier, nor the ring for that matter. The loss of crozier and ring rendered the abbess's authority ritually "impotent, or at least less potent than an abbot's."[63] By the thirteenth century, as documented by Durandus in his authoritative pontifical, things had changed

61 On gender and class restrictions related to the wearing of rings as written down by men, see also Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 309; Jasperse, "Metal Jewellery." For prohibitions on the wearing of jewellery (including rings) in Jewish law (Halakha), see Schnitzer, "The Treasure," 717–29; Yahalom, "Men's Jewelry," 59–77.

62 Macy, *The Hidden History of Women's Ordination*, 82.

63 Bugyis, "The Development of the Consecration Rite," 138.

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for the abbot, who was now again invested with the ring, but the pontifical is silent on the insignia of abbesses. Perhaps Durandus's statement that abbesses should use the form for abbots with feminine endings might be taken as an indication that the investiture ritual was the same, including both crozier and ring.[64] Even if ring and crozier were not officially bestowed on abbesses, burial finds and representations of abbesses indicate that they wielded the staff frequently, but the evidence for rings is opaque.

While the abbess oversaw her nuns' daily life, their consecration (like that of the abbess herself) was highly regulated by men who had designed its ritual and performed it. When young women—after years of preparation at the convent—entered the ceremony of their coronation, they received veil, crown, and ring from the bishop. In response to receiving the ring, the nun declared: "With His ring my Lord, Jesus Christ, has betrothed me, and like a spouse he has adorned me with a crown."[65] A gold ring found at Perth (Scotland) and preserved at the British Museum bears the inscription + O CEST:ANEL:DE:ChASTETE/ SEV:ESPOSE:A IhESV CRIST (With this ring of chastity am I wedded to Jesus Christ) and is an expensive and brightly shining testimonial to the spiritual betrothal.[66] The text is inscribed on the outside of the hoop and thus highly visible to its wearer, functioning as visual and haptic reminder of the nun's spiritual duties towards her heavenly husband. In her analysis of the liturgy of a nun's coronation in late medieval northern Germany, Julie Hotchin emphasizes how the texts sung during this ritual "function as emotives in that they at once express and produce emotion, singing into presence the nuns' intense feeling of love that they declare."[67] This strongly resonates with what Standley called "emotants," artifacts saturated with emotions. Like antiphonal singing (an emotional performance), the nuns' rings were affective expressions of the devotional commitment to Christ and religious life. But nuns' rings did more. As visual expressions of female monastic life these small ornaments also tied together

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64 I thank Juliette Calvarin for discussing this with me.

65 Hotchin, "Emotions and the Ritual of a Nun's Coronation," 182.

66 British Museum, www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_AF-895; Jones, *Finger-Ring Lore*, 240, where he also mentions another nun's ring inscribed with "God with Maria" in the Waterton Collection at the South Kensington Museum (now Victoria & Albert), which perhaps is the ring with the inscription *god. help. anna. Maria*. See https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121878/ring-unknown/. This inscription is however more ambiguous then the one now in the British Museum. A nun's ring is also mentioned and depicted in Gilchrist, *Gender and Material Culture*, 185.

67 Hotchin, "Emotions and the Ritual of a Nun's Coronation," 183.

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the community, setting it apart from those who were not betrothed to Christ. Nuns' rings can thus be viewed as one of many visual and material signifiers of religious class and sex.

But thinking about status and gender does not stop here. In the British Museum's online catalogue, we read that the inscribed nun's ring was purchased by Lord Richard Cornwallis Neville (4th Baron Braybrooke) in London in 1858, where it was sold by a Mr. Sharp. It then came into possession of Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, who bequeathed it to the museum in 1897. So here we have wealthy male collectors, of whom one endowed his rings to a museum. Collectors' tastes, interests, and connoisseurship have impacted the way we study and conceptualize rings, namely as elite items. Importantly, Diana Scarisbrick pointed out that women were collectors of rings (and other jewels) as well as significant contributors to museums' collections.[68] Focusing on the sale and acquisition of a Byzantine marriage ring and other pieces of jewellery, in Chapter 8 Elizabeth McCord details how Mildred Bliss (together with and her husband Robert Woods) created a medieval collection at Dumbarton Oaks that not only showcases their ambitions to make these items available for scholarly research, but also reflects their wealth, which allowed them to turn commodities into collectables (which could, if needed, become commodities again). As McCord observes, Bliss's wealth and drive to collect were not novel, nor do they break with earlier traditions.

Going beyond the splendour of our Pamplona ring—the kind of brilliance that, as we have seen, can captivate and blind art historians—we appreciate that rings adorn the hands of people from different class, gender, and age. We even find that intellectuals concerned themselves with these small adornments, promoting ideas of appropriate wear and moral behaviour. Rings' social lives were thus intimately connected with ideas about personhood and group identity of which gender and status were an integral part. Even when no longer in the hands of medieval people, rings remained an expression and affirmation of class, but now of those who collected and presented them.

Safekeeping and Presentation

As several authors in this volume point out, rings themselves served as miniature but mighty containers for personal memories, beliefs, political affiliations, and much more. Notwithstanding their capacity to preserve, medieval rings usually lack an inside that could be accessed, making them into

68 Scarisbrick, "Four Centuries of Ring Collectors," xvi–xvi on women collectors.

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Figure 0.5. Triptych ring, fifteenth century. Gold and traces of enamel, w. 10 mm; diameter 21 mm; head 9 × 11 mm, weight 5 g. Griffin Collection, inv. 2016-006. © Les Enluminures. Used with permission.

"not-quite-containers."[69] Perhaps rings that can be opened and thus present something "inside," such as the triptych ring discussed by Hindman in her analysis of some iconographic rings (Figure 0.5),[70] come closest to the notion of a container put forward by Andrew Shryock and Daniel Lord Smail as "any object that can hold something else inside itself for an indefinite period of time, isolating the contents from the give and take of the world outside."[71] When closed, the image contained within the iconographic ring (the Holy Trinity and Annunciation) is removed from the visible and tangible outside world. Yet upon removing the pin and opening the doors on whose exterior St. George (left) and St. Catherine (right) are depicted, the interior unfolds the spiritual, inner world of its user, whose eyes and fingers engaged with the delicate carvings that testify to the craftmanship of this ring.

With their definition, Shryock and Smail underscore that objects stored within containers are removed from circulation, even though this removal may be short-lived. The kind of containers that were used to keep rings were varied. Apart from inventories—that document and organize rings' histories, value, and ownership—graves, and ecclesiastical institutions who received donated rings, there were also bags, chasses and chests, and larger built structures such as cellars and towers. The Pamplona ring was kept in an

69 Shryock and Smail, "On Containers: A Forum," 2.

70 Hindman, "Medieval Iconographic Rings," 495–96.

71 Shryock and Smail, "On Containers: A Forum," 2.

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embroidered purse. Standley mentions a satin bag that served as a container for an assemblage of lead-alloy signs owned by Queen Charlotte of France (d. 1483), who, in all likelihood, valued them not because of their material worth but because of their connectedness to saints, shrines, and shielding powers.[72] The "miracle rings" at Santo Estevo were also kept in a purse after their retrieval from the retable behind the main altar (see Figure 7.3). This early modern purse served as a portable soft shrine for these relics, but after their storage in a polychromed wooden reliquary chest mounted in a cabinet above the choir stall, their movements seem to have come to halt again.[73]

A more extreme way of protecting precious goods was hiding them in the earth, walls, and floors. In this volume, examples of such storage are mentioned by Raffensperger and Standley.[74] Hoarding usually took place in times of crisis, although the circumstances that led to specific items being hidden away may never be fully explained. Returning once more to our sapphire ring, an inhabitant of Calle de la Merced 27 decided to safekeep it together with gold coins in a wall, which was uncovered when building activities took place in the 1940s. Until the early 1590s this street was originally called Calle Mayor de la Judería; a street at the heart of the Jewish quarter in Pamplona, and close to its *alcaicería* (marketplace or bazaar).[75] The preservation of the ring and coins suggests that the ring itself was kept foremost because of its material value as a gold object, not as a particular personal item. This tallies with Rafael Arrizabalaga Lizarraga's interpretation of the built structure as one of multiple small Jewish workshops (ca. 50m2) in this street, which were mentioned in the Navarrese royal financial registers (*comptos*).[76] In the financial accounts for 1341, Arrizabalaga found eight silver smiths (*argenteros*), one shoemaker, one tailor, and multiple menders situated in the shops near the *alcaicería*. So perhaps the owner of the coins and ring was a Jewish goldsmith, or a supplier of gold that would be used by other craftsmen.[77] But we cannot rule out the possibility that yet another person

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72 Chapter 2, p. 68; also Rasmussen, *Medieval Badges*, esp. ch. 4.

73 See Chapter 7 in this volume.

74 Examples of hoards that included jewellery are manifold, so here I only mention Cherry, "Mon Coeur Avez," 49–57; Duczko et al., "A New Late Viking-Age Hoard from Poland," 145–56; Labarta, "El tesorillo andalusí," 783–802.

75 Martinena, *La Pamplona de los burgos*, 185–86.

76 Arrizabalaga Lizarraga, "Judería y chapitel," 857–99, at 876. On Jewish inhabitants of Pamplona and their fiscal connections with the crown of Navarre, see also Carrasco Pérez, "Juderías y sinagogas," 123–28.

77 This has also been observed by Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 205, who

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left his or her purse with coins and ring at Calle de la Merced 27 for safekeeping. In any case, around 1400 (the approximate date of the hoard based on a dating of the coins as *terminus quem*) a person seems to have hidden his valuables. But why?

Perhaps they were simply stored in order to safeguard them from thieves. This does, however, not explain why the goods remained in place for so long, as one would expect a retrieval of the items. Maybe social unrest inspired this hoarding. For the German treasures at Colmar and Erfurt—both containing rings, coins, and other metal items such as belts and silver cups—it has been plausibly argued that they belonged to Jewish owners based on their contents.[78] Our Pamplona ring, as mentioned earlier, reveals nothing about the gendered or religious identity of its owner/wearer. While some medieval rings can securely be connected to Jewish wearers because they were found in Jewish cemeteries or because of Hebrew inscriptions, documentary evidence also indicate that Jewish people owned rings with precious stones that lack inscriptions, such as a "gold ring with ruby stone."[79] Had the Pamplona ring been recorded somewhere, it would probably have been described in a very similar way.

When in 1347 the bubonic plague ravaged throughout Europe, Jews were frequently held responsible and were persecuted in French and German speaking territories. These intertwined events of plague and pogroms led to the burying of costly items that their owners hoped to retrieve when the dust settled. At that same time, such pogroms also happened in the Iberian Peninsula, and in 1391 Jews were persecuted in Andalusia and the states of the crown of Aragon.[80] Yet Navarra escaped such turmoil until the Jews were expelled from the kingdom in 1498, almost a century after the dating of the Pamplona hoard.[81] That said, Beatrice Leroy enumerates multiple examples demonstrating that Jews in Navarre faced intolerance, which sometimes resulted in death, but more usually consisted of taxes and fines that were paid to the crown. We can only speculate whether it was general

presents the ring in connection with rings found in Jewish contexts, see 201–31.

78 Descatoire, *Trésors de la Peste noire*; Drake, *The Colmar Treasure*; Stürzebecher, "The Medieval Jewish Ring," 72–79, with references to earlier publications. Stürzebecher, "Der Schatzfund aus der Michaelisstrasse in Erfurt," 61–64 (with references to other German finds).

79 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 30.

80 Leroy, *The Jews of Navarre*, 142. Navarra had welcomed Jews expelled from Aquitaine and France in 1290, 1306, 1322, and 1394.

81 Arrizabalaga Lizarraga, "Judería y chapitel," 876.

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social unrest that pressed the owner or keeper of the coins and ring to store the goods. While the plan was likely to retrieve the goods, circumstances seem to have forced its owner to abandon them. The ring—together with the coins and the small bags in which they were contained—serve as reminder of this (forced) abandonment.

Unfortunately, questions concerning ownership and hoarding cannot be completely answered. Yet the combination of the sapphire ring and 117 coins from different regions (including France and Italy) preserved in two bags created in the Nasrid kingdom of Granada is interesting, as it tells us that at one location multiple cultures and materials merged. In fact, this is how the hoard is displayed at the end of room 27 at the MAN (see Figure 0.1), where it is part of the installation that shows that the Iberian Peninsula cultivated ties with Europe during the late Middle Ages. These links explain the presence of a range of coins from different territories, and perhaps also allow us to speculate that the ring arrived at Spain from France.

After they were sold to collectors and sent to museums, the value of rings as commodities is replaced with a singularization importance based on their (art) historical value. Museums are large containers in which rings are not only preserved, but also presented. Although many rings held by museums are not on display, those that are shown are not just material items (not be touched), but also representants of a museum's narrative. The presentation of the sapphire ring at the MAN is only one of many stories that rings can tell.[82] In her Epilogue to this volume, Sandra Hindman explores museum presentations in more detail, demonstrating the different solutions their curators reach to present these small items in accessible ways. Here, I briefly mention two temporary exhibitions that addressed rings (and other jewels) as moveable items related to status and gender. In the exhibition *Jewelry: The Body Transformed* (New York, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2018), rings and other adornments were presented in close connection with the human body. Asking challenging questions of "what jewelry is…how it works and why we wear it,"[83] the curators used "creative mounting solutions that placed jewellery in dialogue with visitors' bodies…and abstracted moulded body parts emerged from the backing fabric."[84] Rings were combined with other artifacts in the recent exhibition *Rich in Blessings: Women,*

82 For a brief overview of five museum displays of jewellery, see Church, "Five Great Museums to see Jewellery," https://thelifeofjewels.com/five-great-museums-to-see-jewellery/.

83 Holcomb, *Jewelry*, 9.

84 Colburn and Williams, "Displaying Byzantine Dress," 230.

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Wealth, and the Late Antique Household (Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 2023–2024). There, some rings were displayed together with other luxury items to analyze the practicalities and moralities of women's wealth in Late Antiquity. The exhibition highlights that the visual and material record helps us to understand women's access to and display of wealth.

When we enjoy the display of the riches in any of the mentioned museums—these large repositories of heritage—we do well to remember that we do so because of the finds of archaeologists, farmers, and workmen. Many museums acknowledge the support of (often) wealthy collectors, who bequeathed artworks to museums to ensure their safekeeping. While the Pamplona hoard—as so many other hoards—is proof that concealment can lead to preservation, the rings found in inventories, caskets, bags, museums, and archaeological databases showcase that display was and is still crucial to items' conservation and appreciation as well.

The Intricate Lives of Rings

The Pamplona ring was not merely a precious commodity, but an object with multiple lives which I have tried to uncover by thinking about its material makeup, as well as its engagement with human bodies of specific rank and gender and its safekeeping. At present, the ring is a piece of cultural heritage preserved in a showcase at the MAN and in its online database. But an analysis of its past lives—no matter how incomplete—indicates that the ring is, by no means, in the final life stage. This opening chapter is, in fact, a testimonial to that.

In Chapter 1, Mariah Proctor-Tiffany's analysis of French wills reminds us that rings could be highly personal pieces of adornment that were treasured as heirlooms imbued with the affective and political presence of former owners. At times, this presence was literally felt when rings were touched by their subsequent owners who treasured and wore them. Their touch was also activated in moments of diplomatic gifting as well as collecting frenzies. Importantly, what Proctor-Tiffany has labelled as "haptic histories" not only inspires us to analyze when, how, and why medieval artifacts connect people, but also invites us to pay special attention to women as nodes in haptic networks. This article can stimulate further research on the haptic qualities of jewels and their containers throughout their long lives.

Focusing on England in the late medieval and early modern period, in Chapter 2 Eleanor Standley draws attention to the crucial role played by archaeology in our interpretation of the variety of connotations rings may have held to their owners. Crossing multiple centuries, the author details

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different meaning for rings decorated with a heart. The heart establishes and memorializes romantic or spousal love in a medieval setting, but takes on more political and devotional connotations in early modern England. The rings discussed offer compelling evidence for the wide range of people that owned, cherished, and lost these items. Standley's article is a potent reminder that the archaeological unearthing of these material artifacts is what allows us to study them as social actants in the first place.

The wide circulation of rings crossing territorial borders and connecting religious and secular elite circles (including concubines) is further highlighted in Chapter 3, by Inés Calderón, who analyzes an impressive range of written documents from Iberia. While these sources may be known to historians studying specific Iberian kingdoms, they have not yet been studied together to provide a bigger picture of how rings moved within Iberia at large. Calderón finds evidence for their commodity value as financial resources, which explains the loss of so many items and their absence in eleventh- and twelfth-century documents. This changed by ca. 1200, allowing the author to trace how rings acted as connecting tissue between different generations and regions. Importantly, the gifting of rings also fostered religious commemoration. Yet some rings were not to be parted with, because they held amuletic value that clearly singularized them as very special, even saintly, rings.

Both Proctor-Tiffany and Calderón emphasize the importance of women as owners and movers of rings. Women's ownership is further discussed by Christian Raffensperger in Chapter 4, where he analyzes two monogram-signet rings found in Kyiv. In his article, Raffensperger recognizes that these rings do not offer crystal-clear stories about women's power in Rus. Yet, when taken together with the sparse but convincing evidence of women as landowners and their participation in decision making, these small items begin to unfold some of their agency in social networks. With the rings, the author adds another layer to the complex but important narrative of political and social power of Rusian women. Thus small artifacts rather than the grand narratives told by chroniclers (and historians) draw women from Rus into the larger narrative of medieval Europe.

That signet rings were key players in the communication of political and religious status and affiliation in al-Andalus is discussed by Ana Labarta in Chapter 5. Readers not familiar with her monograph *Anillos de la península ibérica*—in which she brings together Christian, Islamic, and Jewish rings, significantly widening the corpus of material published in English—will find a wealth of source material from Islamic Spain in her current chapter. In particular, Labarta makes insightful observations about how these diminutive

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jewels were noticed by viewers and inspired discussions. While men are at the heart of her chapter, her observations on rings related with women, for example in the context of conversion, might spark further research.

Animated debates are not only fuelled by men wearing rings in Islamic society, but also in Catholicism, by bishop's rings. In a novel approach to bishop's signet rings from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, Juliette Calvarin (Chapter 6) assesses letters, pontificals, liturgical commentaries, and two surviving rings in order "to trace the fate of the episcopal signet ring as lived reality, symbol, and afterimage" (p. 162). Calvarin brings to light how this type of ring was understood as an object and a symbol in the rituals of election and consecration. By including two surviving bishops' rings, the challenges of combining the written and visual evidence become apparent, if only because much remains unknown about how and when surviving rings were worn.

The rings discussed by Calvarin are the kind of rings we have in mind when thinking about bishops' rings: made of gold, set with precious stones, elaborately decorated, and preferably inscribed. As we see in Chapter 7, these elements combined with the bulkiness of surviving specimens, such as the impressive ring associated with Bishop Rosendo at Celenova (see Figure 7.7), have determined our image of what a bishop's ring should look like. Therese Martin invites us to take a fresh look at four largely unknown "miracle working" rings at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. In a grand gesture of scholarly reflection, she holds up a mirror in which we see reflected our preconceived notions about what is appropriate for bishops to wear. Martin makes clear that these can cloud our judgements when we engage with questions about authenticity that the general audience is so keen to see answered: do the four rings belong to the saintly medieval bishops? The reader is invited to follow Martin back in time as she unravels this question through a careful analysis of the material and written record.

It is doubtful whether the four relatively plain-looking rings from Santo Estevo would have attracted the attention of the twentieth-century collectors Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss. These rings are nothing like the splendid Byzantine marriage rings the couple acquired (through sale or as gifts) for Dumbarton Oaks. In Chapter 8, Elizabeth McCord uses their correspondence to paint a vivid picture of the collectors' ambitions for Dumbarton Oaks to become a research collection of Byzantine, Pre-Columbian, and Garden and Landscape Studies. In a critical assessment of their motivations, McCord also sketches how wealth, sale prices, personal financial considerations, and social status determine how and why objects become collectables. Relating these modern considerations to rings' past lives as markers

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of status, wealth, and gendered identities, the authors inspires us to connect past and present.

In the Epilogue, Sandra Hindman shares her observations on how rings can be fruitfully approached if we consider more recent moments in their rich lives. Focusing on historic finger rings in museum collections, she analyzes various modes of display in order to assess how museums foster the engagement between rings and modern audiences. Her art historical eye brings to life rings and representations thereof in paintings and sculpture as sold, bought, worn, and displayed items. Hindman fosters a more refined understanding of rings because they are studied together with other artworks.

While the articles can be read individually, this volume argues that a collective closer look at these diminutive artifacts—both precious and mundane—as well as an assessment of their place within the archaeological and written record and in museum contexts tells us more nuanced stories about how and why these small and sensory items were crafted and were able to forge connections between people and institutions.

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Chapter 1

HAPTIC HISTORIES

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

MARIAH PROCTOR-TIFFANY

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."

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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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."

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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

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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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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]

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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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"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-

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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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Chapter 2

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE OF LATER MEDIEVAL AND EARLY MODERN FINGER-RINGS IN BRITAIN

RINGS, EXPERIENCES, AND EMOTIONS

ELEANOR R. STANDLEY

IN THE PAST, as they are today, finger-rings were imbued with and embodied emotions and memories. Remarkable survivals of gold, gem-set rings, and portraits showing sitters wearing jewels may give the impression that only the elites owned and cherished rings in the medieval and early modern periods, however, finger-rings of a range of materials and monetary value were owned by a variety of people, including those of lower status. While some may not have been able to afford expensive rings, the emotional value of the cheaper forms may have been equally important to their owners. To advance the archaeology of emotion as an approach, I have defined tangible archaeological evidence that is characterized by or serves in the capacity of emotion as an emotant.[1] This approach has been employed in order to develop the study of emotion in archaeology, particularly for the later medieval period in which the subject has had little focus compared with the archaeology of prehistory or the post-medieval period.[2]

In this chapter, I will present examples of finger-rings from Britain that reveal some of the ways that they were linked with people's experiences and emotions during the period ca. 1200–1660. The discussion of the designs, materials, deposition, and recovery of the rings is intended to illuminate some of the varied facets of their uses and meanings. By exploring the social,

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1 Standley, "Love and Hope," see p. 745 for definition.

2 See Standley, "Love and Hope"; Standley, "Ffylle the Cuppe"; Tarlow, "Emotion in Archaeology"; Tarlow, "The Archaeology of Emotion."

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political, and religious contexts of use, light can be shed on the lives of the rings, and the experiences and emotions of their owners. I will use the terms "emotion," "feeling," and "affect" interchangeably as the word "emotion" was not in use during the later English Middle Ages, and only from around 1600 came to mean an agitation of mind or intense feeling.[3] I have argued that emotants can be affected by human emotion and/or can influence the emotion felt by a person,[4] thus, we may consider how finger-rings were emotants and how they could communicate, change, create, or intensify emotions, or be used in ways prompted by human feeling.

Firstly, I will present some of the limitations of the data, particularly the relatively low numbers of finger-rings recovered during archaeological excavations. I will then consider how archaeological chance finds can supplement the excavated artifacts and museums' existing collections. In the rest of the chapter, rings and their emotional, social, and intellectual value and roles will be explored. Many of these aspects were, and are, interpreted through their materials, imagery, inscriptions, symbolism, and findspots. Devotional use—whether it be secular devotion to a person or cause, or religious devotion to a saint or member of the Holy Family—is also revealed; the protective agency of the rings is recognized by the symbols and materials. The role of rings in the development and promotion of individual memorialization and identity, and as intellectual material culture of elite society is also touched upon. Finally, rings that have survived in hoards are considered. These are particularly significant in providing evidence of past experiences during religious and social changes. No individual identity, such as gender, age, or status, forms a specific focus of the chapter as identities were intersectional, and attributing a single ring or ring type to a particular person, gender, or even household, can be difficult.[5]

The Archaeological Evidence in Britain

The superb ring collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A) provides us with the opportunity to enter the sumptuous world of medieval and early modern rings.[6] This institution, like the British Museum and the Ashmolean

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3 Standley, "Love and Hope," 742; *OED*, "Emotion."

4 Standley, "Love and Hope."

5 Intersectional meaning that identity "characteristics" were multi- and co-valent, and entangled. Some of these difficulties are considered further below.

6 Abbreviations of the names of institutions will be used throughout the chapter when referring to them and their accession numbers, i.e., Victoria and Albert

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Museum, benefited from the donations of Dame Joan Evans's unique and important personal finger-ring collection.[7] Scholars have utilized the collections, among others, to publish academic and more general-interest works on finger-rings and other jewellery, demonstrating the ever-enduring attraction of these objects.[8] A search of the online collections of the V&A reveals that of the 132 rings that are recorded as being from England, eighty-seven are made of gold with a further fifteen of silver.[9] We could assume therefore, from this collection alone, that precious metals dominated the form of rings worn in medieval England and such jewellery was limited to the wealthy. However, museum collections are inherently varied and biased, whether due to the methods of recovery and personal interests of collectors, or to the collecting policies of the institutions.[10] How can we therefore explore this bias and expand our view of medieval finger-rings and their wearers?

Archaeologically excavated examples can aid our understanding, but these too cannot reveal the whole picture. It is normal for archaeologists to recover none or only a couple of rings at an excavation, regardless of site type or scale of excavation.[11] The reasons for this relatively low number of excavated rings are numerous and are affected by practices in the past and modern excavation foibles. For example, rings could have been recovered by someone if they were accidentally lost; they were unlikely to be regularly thrown away as rubbish; buildings were often kept clean during occupation thus reducing the number of small finds carelessly lost or left to be later found as excavated artifacts; and personal adornments were often bequeathed as heirlooms and gifts, thus being passed down through gen-

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Museum, London: V&A; British Museum, London: BM; Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology, University of Oxford: AM; London Museum (formerly Museum of London): LM; Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York: MMA; National Museums Scotland: NMS; and the Portable Antiquities Scheme: PAS.

7 V&A, *V&A Archive Research Guide*; BM, "Dame Joan Evans"; AM, *Report of the Visitors*, 18.

8 For example, Evans, *English Posies and Posy Rings*; Oman, *British Rings*; Scarisbrick, *Finger-Rings*; Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power*; Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*; Campbell, *Medieval Jewellery*.

9 V&A online collections search carried out on September 23, 2022, using filters: object type: "ring," dates: "1200–1649," and place "England."

10 For example, see Burgess, "State of the Field;" MacDonald, "Counting When, Who and How."

11 For example, thirty-seven rings were recovered from sixteen different excavations in London, and made up only 2 percent of the 1,784 dress accessories catalogued in Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories* (which excluded badges).

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erations rather than entering the archaeological record. Similarly, the large amount of recycling of metals that would have been carried out reduces the number that survive.[12] Additionally, the burial-tradition for the period under consideration here also limits the number of finds recovered from graves, as the vast majority of burials were not accompanied by grave goods.[13] Activity at the sites in medieval and later periods (particularly during the Reformation in England and construction of Victorian cellars), and the scale and methods of excavations also affects artifact recovery.

Archaeological sites take different forms and have assorted histories, making the recovery of accessories variable, but also making it difficult to identify their past owners.[14] The finds from the River Thames foreshore excavations undertaken in the 1970s and 1980s in the City of London illustrate this. Made of base- and precious-metals,[15] later medieval rings were recovered, including three gold rings set with garnet cabochons (polished into a rounded shape, rather than faceted) from Trig Lane.[16] These garnet-set rings were among the late fourteenth-century infills of revetments created during land reclamation of the river.[17] A further two gold rings were found at Baynard's Castle Dock and Billingsgate excavations; the former was originally set with two cabochon stones (only one emerald survives) and the latter contained a sapphire cabochon.[18] Unfortunately, it cannot be known if the material culture in the infills illustrates activities and life near these areas of the river, or simply how the Thames was used as a dump for material coming from other locations; the material remains also have no signature to suggest they were primarily either domestic or craft waste.[19] Quite how and why the gold and other rings ended up in the dumped material is unknown. The best guess is that they were accidental losses that ended up in the rubbish, but from whom or where is not known, with the possible

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12 Of course, not all finger-rings were made of metal; some are of glass, bone, or other natural materials such as gemstones.

13 See Gilchrist and Sloane, *Requiem: The Medieval Monastic Cemetery*.

14 See Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*.

15 "Precious-metals" are gold or silver that may also be alloyed, while "base-metals" include the other non-ferrous metals and their alloys, for example copper alloys or lead-tin alloys.

16 Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, 325–35.

17 Milne and Milne, *Medieval Waterfront Development*, 26, 91.

18 Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, nos. 1611 and 1614.

19 Milne and Milne, *Medieval Waterfront Development*, 85.

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exception of the Baynard's Castle Dock find that may have been associated with the noble waterfront mansion, rebuilt in 1428, and then again as a royal palace by Henry VII in 1501.[20] Regardless, the finds as a whole reveal the types and styles of rings worn and lost by Londoners in the twelfth to fifteenth centuries.

Attempting to understand the full range of finger-rings worn by the medieval and early modern population and their significance from only excavated sites or museums' collections is challenging. Fortunately, archaeological chance finds discovered in England and Wales have been recorded for more than 25 years through the Portable Antiquities Scheme (PAS) and can supplement excavated finds and museum collections.[21]

While there are limitations to the resource, there is a lack of archaeological contexts for the finds, and only a small percentage become part of English or Welsh museum collections via donations or through the Treasure Act 1996, the PAS is an excellent resource for the study of finger-rings.[22] As most of the chance finds are recovered by metal-detectorists, and it is a legal requirement to report gold and silver objects over 300 years old, the majority of the rings recorded are made of precious- or base-metals.[23] Furthermore, the number of rings found by chance is vast in comparison with the volume from excavations, and they provide a far broader picture of the types of metal rings worn in the past. Many of the chance finds are recovered in rural areas, so they supplement the meagre finds at rural excavations where the number of small finds is typically lower than at urban sites. The rings found outside of rural domestic buildings could have been deposited with rubbish, some of which was also manured into agricultural land, or were lost by accident as people moved through or worked in the landscape. Some may even have been buried or hidden on purpose.

20 Schofield with Maloney, *Archaeological Excavations in the City of London*, 93.

21 PAS, www.finds.org.uk. Chance finds of ancient objects (whether of precious metal or not) found in Scotland are reported and recorded through the Scottish Treasure Trove System.

22 See also Standley, "Love and Hope"; Kennedy, "English Iconographic Rings," 80–100.

23 Out of 5,682 finger-rings recorded on the PAS dating to between ca. 1066 and 1720, 56 percent are gold or silver; only three rings made of animal skeletal material have been recorded. Data on the PAS database as of June 24, 2022. For details of the Treasure Act 1996 and requirements for reporting of treasure, see PAS, www.finds.org.uk.

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Troth and Hearts

Finger-rings, as now, were a common betrothal gift, and formed an important part of the betrothal ritual in the later medieval and early modern periods. In the painting of *A Goldsmith in his Shop* by Petrus Christus (see Figure 9.5 in the Epilogue),[24] the types of rings a couple could choose from in ca. 1440s Bruges are on display in a workshop-cum-shop; the gold rings are stacked, and some are set with gems. Some are closely comparable with rings found in Britain; for example, a diamond set stirrup-ring found at Holyrood Palace in Scotland, and a double gem-set ring with an inscription from a parish on the outskirts of York (North Yorkshire).[25] Equivalent styles are not limited to Britain as similar finds have been found elsewhere in Western Europe, for example, in the Netherlands and Germany. The stirrup-ring design had a long life and was used from the mid-twelfth to the mid-fifteenth centuries, however, the popularity of diamonds rose in the fourteenth century. Diamonds are naturally octahedron in shape and by 1400 diamond-cutting allowed for more varied forms, the technique first achieved perhaps in Paris or the Low Countries by 1300.[26] The diamond's perceived virtues were recorded in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century lapidaries. Wearing a diamond was believed to provide a man with strength and virtue, it encouraged conception and prevented miscarriage for women.[27] The ring from near York which is dated to the fifteenth century, is set with a ruby and an emerald, with the apt heartfelt inscription, "bon ♥ ne ment [or meut]" (the good heart does not lie [or move]). The two stones represented two lovers, and their virtues—passion and new love.

Although rarer recoveries, gold or gem-set rings are found through excavation, such as those from the City of London discussed above. Another excavated gold ring from London is a find from the Rose Theatre.[28] The concave cross-sectioned ring provides an example of an emotionally charged ring worn by a Londoner in the sixteenth century. Its outer inscription reads "PENCES POVR MOYE DV" followed by a heart pierced with two arrows, thus "Think of me from the ♥."[29] This lost ring ended up embedded in the yard

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24 MMA,1975.1.110.

25 NMS, H.NJ 68; Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, 88; Standley, "Love and Hope," fig. 3.

26 Campbell, "Gold, Silver and Precious Stones," 137.

27 Evans and Serjeanston, *English Mediaeval Lapidaries*, 30–31.

28 Bowsher and Miller, *The Rose and the Globe*, 62.

29 In Bowsher and Miller, *The Rose and the Globe*, fig. 114, and the LM record SBH88[183]<283>, "DV" are considered to be an abbreviation of the Latin, *Deo*

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surface of the theatre, which would naturally have seen a high level of foot-fall by standing audience members.

Such a ring would have been a suitable betrothal or marriage ring and had the potential to have its own agency in order to become an emotant and stimulate emotions and memories of a loved one. The heart motif, as seen on the Rose Theatre ring and that from York, was an all-encompassing entity for the emotions borne by the rings and felt by the wearer.[30] The heart formed an intrinsic part of the agency of the objects, and the word or symbol is found on more finger-rings than the word "love" or any other affective word.[31] It was the centre of the passions and thus, the symbol was conceptually essential to the feelings that the emotant objects were entwined with.

The motif of the heart with crossed arrows is worth considering further. By the fourteenth century it was a symbol found on material culture associated with love; pendants and badges incorporated the motif with the word *Amour*, and fourteenth-century ivory mirror cases often depicted the God of Love with their arrows aimed at couples.[32] The motif continued in use on dress accessories, and we find hearts pierced with arrows, and sometimes flaming hearts, on seventeenth-century silver cufflinks. Michael Lewis has suggested that the motifs were associated with the celebrations around the marriage of Charles II and Catherine de Braganza in 1662.[33] I posit that the pierced heart has deeper Royalist connections that can be traced to earlier material culture, including finger-rings.

Pendants and lockets show that the heart-with-arrows motif was adopted by the martyrdom cult of Charles I after his regicide in 1649. Examples are known with a variety of inscriptions, including "I live and dy in loyaltye" and "Who can refrain from tears."[34] The motif is also found with eyes, often weeping tear drops. Those with weeping eyes reference the sadness, but also God's all surveying eye that would pursue the rebels for spilling the innocent blood of Charles, and in some cases the teardrops could also dually represent the spilt blood. An incomplete copper alloy seal-ring with

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volente, with the inscription reading, "Think of me God willing," but this seems unlikely.

30 Standley, "Love and Hope," 746.

31 Standley, "Love and Hope," fig. 2.

32 For example, Beuningen et al., *Heilig en Profaan*, afb. 904–5; BM, 1856,0701.2132; V&A, 221-1867.

33 Lewis, "Crown and Heart."

34 BM, M.7289 and M.7291.

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this motif is in the Ashmolean, and two others recorded on the PAS,[35] while the motif is also found on seal matrices of copper alloy and silver that are currently broadly dated to the seventeenth-century (Figures 2.1a–b).[36] I suggest that these pieces are objects of the post-January 1649 martyrdom cult, indicating the troth and devotion of the owners to Charles I and to his exiled son (the future Charles II). The eye motif was easily modified to depict, or simply interpreted as, a crown after the Restoration in 1660 (see Figure 2.1b).[37] Such an iconographic change can help refine the dating of these objects so often found without datable contexts and reveal their political and social significance; they were not referencing romantic love, but love of and devotion to a cause.

Materials and Holy Veneration

Other private reminders of love and remembrance of a deceased loved one or of Christ are found inscribed on rings, often on the inner band. For example, a small gold ring with a finely carved inner inscription of "*Iè: lamèntè: Iusguès: a la*" was found in a context of the early 1660s at Auckland Castle (County Durham), the palace of the bishops of Durham.[38] The inscription is a form of *Je lamente jusqu'à la fin* (I lament until the end), and perhaps the unending form of the ring meant it was not necessary to add the last word. Remarkably, a second rare ring has been excavated at the palace: a fragment of a facetted, carved jet ring. This is probably of an early sixteenth-century date, based on a comparable find in London.[39] The physical and attributed properties of jet gave the stone powerful virtues and it was used in apotropaic amulets in the later medieval and early modern periods. Its rich, true black colour, smoothness, and warmness to the touch increased its desirability, alongside its magical values of protection. Jet was thought to protect from venomous creatures, act as an anaesthetic, cure cataracts and toothache, improve vision, and protect from witchcraft.[40] Dress accessories made

35 AM, AN1920.360 (no provenance); Reavill, *HESH-B5CCB2*; Webley, *HAMP-7377D7*.

36 For example, Oakden, *LVPL-00F0F7*.

37 It is difficult to differentiate between an eye and a crown on some.

38 Christopher Gerrard personal communication, 2022; excavated by Durham University and Auckland Project Trust; Standley, "The Small Finds."

39 Excavated from Abbots Lane, Southwark, London, see Egan, *Material Culture in London*, 54, no. 237.

40 Standley, *Trinkets and Charms*, 86.

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Figure 2.1. Two silver seal matrices, seventeenth century. (a) An example of the proposed post-January 1649 Royalist martyrdom eye and heart motif, found in Shropshire. Image rotated and cropped from Oakden, LVPL-00F0F7, National Museum Liverpool. CC BY-SA 4.0.
(b) An example of the proposed post-1660 Restoration crown and heart motif, found in Dorset. Image cropped from Hayward Trevarthen, DOR-455AD3, Somerset County Council. CC BY-SA.

from the material, such as rosary beads, pendants, and rings, would have been touched and kept close to the body to draw on the magical powers.

Glass rings that could have imitated precious materials were also manufactured. In York, two glass rings—along with evidence of glass working from the twelfth or early thirteenth century—were excavated, and three yellow glass rings in Winchester (Hampshire) are dated to a similar period, and are comparable with one from Carfax in Oxford (Oxfordshire).[41] A roughly contemporary gold and sapphire stirrup-ring was also found at Carfax showing the variety of materials afforded by residents of medieval Oxford.[42]

Glass could also be used as settings in ring bezels, usually with the intention of imitating natural gems. An unusual moulded-glass cameo setting in a brass ring was excavated from dumped material at Swan Lane, London.[43] The glass is coloured blue and white with localized streaks of red. Such a setting is rare for the date of its context (ca. 1270–1350), and is more common in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century imitation glass cameos.[44] While the colour may have been part of the attraction to a consumer and wearer in London, its moulded decoration of a scorpion lent it a special significance

41 Tweddle, *Finds from Parliament Street*, 222; Biddle et al., *Artefacts from Medieval Winchester*, 653, nos. 2095–97; AM, AN1921.196.

42 AM, AN1928.328.

43 Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, no. 1618.

44 For example, AM, AN1685.A.466, 477, 480, 489, 555, and 539; see Forsyth, *London's Lost Jewels*, 185–88.

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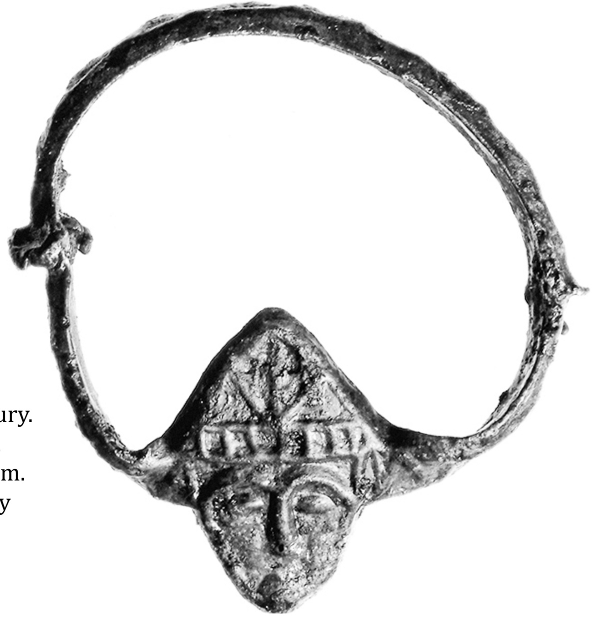

Figure 2.2. Pewter ring with the bezel cast in the form of a mitred head, late fourteenth–fifteenth century. Excavated from the Billingsgate site, London. Diameter (maximum) 16 mm. BWB83[310]<5810>. Reproduced by permission of the London Museum. © London Museum.

and, like the jet rings, it could have acted as a protective or healing amulet. In medieval bestiaries, the scorpion's poison was recommended for the treatment of kidney stones, the animal could be used to heal patients from poisoning and have a cooling effect on fever.[45] In the thirteenth century, Ibn al-Bayṭār wrote that a bezoar stone when set in a ring or pendant should be engraved with the figure of a scorpion when the moon is in that sign, and it could then be put in a patient's mouth or pressed onto their wound to treat the poison.[46] The association of the Scorpio zodiac sign with water may also explain why a blue and white glass was used. A finer onyx seal-ring version is in the V&A; this scorpion intaglio is Roman (ca. 200–100 BCE), while its silver setting is probably fourteenth century in date (see below for the reuse of ancient gems in finger-rings).[47] The power and desirability of these two rings lay in the role of their settings as astrological talismans; they were, and had the ability to make, powerful astrological *sigilla*.[48]

Of course, images of saints, and secondary or tertiary relics were also believed to have healing and protective properties. A small group of cast

45 For example, see Thomas of Cantimpré, *Liber de natura rerum*, Valenciennes, La Médiathèque de Valenciennes, MS 0320, fols. 138r and 138v; V&A, *Object Record 724-1871*.

46 Evans, *Magical Jewels*, 41.

47 V&A, *Object Record 724-1871*. Its surrounding legend is now indecipherable.

48 See Weill-Parot, "Imprinting Powers."

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pewter face-mask rings were excavated from the London Thames foreshore site of Billingsgate and date to the later fourteenth to fifteenth centuries.[49] One is a mournful, bearded face, another is a crowned head, and the last is a mitred head. Egan and Pritchard have commented that these rings are similar in style to contemporary pilgrim tokens, such as badges; the idea that the crowned head represented St. Edward the Confessor has been dismissed, but the mitred figure is confidently considered to be St. Thomas Becket (Figure 2.2).[50] This suggests that the Becket-head ring was a pilgrimage token, and most likely purchased in Canterbury (Kent).[51] It is closely comparable to pilgrim badges from the same period that depict the head reliquary of Becket, and therefore forms part of the large number of pilgrim signs or tokens that are found throughout Europe.

While the Becket-head ring closely resembles the badges of Becket, other rings were also made for the Becket cult. In the Ashmolean's collection are rings made of copper alloy with engraved bezels. The first has an octagonal bezel (that may or may not have acted as a seal ring) and depicts Becket's mitre decorated with two small crosses and a fleur-de-lis, with two or three indecipherable letters underneath divided by a floral sprig.[52] It is dated to the fifteenth century. The second, which was a seal ring (engraved retrograde), has a large "T" on its oval bezel, surrounded by smaller letters that altogether spell *Cappi*[or v]*te + Thomae* (Thomas's Head).[53] This is likely to be slightly earlier in date, due to the lettering and shape of the ring. Buying rings such as these, and the pewter examples, would have provided proof of the visits to the shrine by the devotees and reminded them of the event.[54] If purchased before accessing a shrine or tomb, the pilgrim could create a tertiary relic by touching it to the holy structure. For the Becket rings, the head reliquary that held part of Becket's skull in a life-sized, mitred bust in the *Corona* chapel in Canterbury Cathedral, would have been very apt, and

49 Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, nos. 1641–43.

50 Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, 335. The crowned head could be Henry VI if the rings were made in the later fifteenth century. The mournful face could possibly be St. John the Baptist.

51 Egan and Pritchard, *Dress Accessories*, no. 1642.

52 AM, AN1948.196, unprovenanced.

53 AM, AN1948.197, unprovenanced.

54 Proof of being a pilgrim could also provide protection, as shown by a 1450 story of a man who was abducted by seafaring "enemies." When they found out he was a pilgrim they released him and gave him money (a female pilgrim was also abducted before being robbed and then released). Fenn and Greenwood, *Paston Letters*, no. 8.

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the proximity to the relic could have transferred some of Becket's power to the rings. These evocative personal accessories would have then been worn on the hand in direct contact with the skin, thus keeping the power of the saint as close as possible. Those with the dual function of being a seal matrix could also transfer the power to the wax impressions.

These rings of the Becket cult formed part of the active participation in devotional and venerative experiences, and as emotants would stimulate memories and emotions that were generated during the close encounter with the holy saint. Although cheaper and from large-scale production, the cast pewter rings were perhaps equally emotionally important to their owners as more expensive devotional rings. Lead alloy souvenirs costed around a penny for a dozen, so they were cheap but extremely desirable, as shown by the numbers sold at shrines, their use as evidence to falsify pilgrimages, their ability to admit owners to local confraternities, and the numbers recovered today.[55] We may also see their elevated or equal emotional value in the fact that it was not only the poor who bought the cheaper tokens; Queen Charlotte de Savoie (1443–1483), wife of Louis XI of France, had a collection of lead alloy signs—kept in a satin bag—which were inventoried in 1483.[56] Such cheap tokens, including the rings, contained and had the ability to impart the power of saints and the Holy Family to combat fears and ills.[57] It was the association with the shrine, role as a contact relic, or the imagery that gave this type of base-metal pilgrimage ring (and the other pilgrim tokens) agency, importance, and emotional value to their owners.

At the other end of the scale from the pewter rings—at least in terms of monetary value and materials—are two gold rings from Oxfordshire; one is a large fifteenth-century iconographic ring from Godstow Abbey, and the other is an exquisite reliquary ring found near Thame. From Godstow Abbey, a Benedictine nunnery on the outskirts of Oxford, the elaborate fifteenth-century iconographic ring was found by chance in the nineteenth century.[58] It is a wide band that is richly decorated on the outside with images of the Holy Trinity, the Virgin and Child, and a male saint, interspersed with flowers and leaves, while on the inner band is an inscription in black-letter, "Most in mynd and in myn hert / lothest from you fer to depart." The nunnery was

55 Spencer, *Pilgrim Souvenirs*, 1–24.

56 Gay et al., *Glossaire*, 635, no. 1483.

57 Standley, "Fear, Matter and Miracles," 240–42.

58 BM AF.1075.

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Figure 2.3. Two views of the reliquary ring, ca. 1400. Gold, amethyst, and enamel, the box-bezel (maximum) l. 26 × w. 16 × h. 7.4 mm. From the hoard found near Thame. AN1940.228. Photograph courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.
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a relatively wealthy institution; with an income of over £275 in ca. 1535,[59] it is not unlikely that an abbess could have owned such a ring. Alternatively, it may have been a shrine offering, or lost by a lay corrodian or guest. The abbey was acquired by Sir George Owen after its dissolution in 1539. He was one of Henry VIII's physicians, but also a Catholic recusant, so this ring could have been owned by his family and lost later in the site's history. As with most rings, we will never know the true owner or how it was lost. Nevertheless, the inner, private inscription indicates that Christ and the Holy Family were in the wearer's heart—the centre of emotions—and their mind, never to depart. The words and imagery were a reminder for constant devotion and remembrance, but also the stimulation of affective piety.

The reliquary ring from Oxfordshire is a unique survival and dates to ca. 1400 (Figure 2.3).[60] It is made of multiple components of gold, amethyst, and enamel. The comparatively large rectangular cuboid void for a relic

59 Knowles and Hadcock, *Medieval Religious Houses*, 253. Only seven Benedictine nunneries in England and Wales (out of a total of 101) had a higher net income.

60 Standley, "Hid in the Earth."

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Figure 2.4. Two views of the gold ring found in Bolnhurst and Keysoe, ca. 1400, set with cut garnet, pearls, and decorated with the monogram "AM." Internal diameter 18.5 mm. AN2016.1. Photograph courtesy of the Ashmolean Museum of Art and Archaeology. © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford.
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(most likely a piece of the True Cross) is accessed by rotating flowers on the shorter ends of the bezel, which releases the openwork upper-frame, amethyst, and its supporting back-plate. The ring is also decorated with the invocation MEMANTO MEI DOMINI, and an enamelled scene of the Crucifixion on the reverse of the bezel. Amethyst makes up not only the double-armed cross, but also settings on the outer hoop. The double-armed cross may have been chosen to echo the cross form of the Byzantine world from where relics in the medieval West often originated,[61] or indeed was reused from an older Byzantine reliquary. We cannot know exactly when or how often the ring was opened, but the experience of venerating the relic by the owner would have been enhanced by the act of carefully opening the ring and revealing the precious relic. They would then have the treasured relic itself, the amethyst cross, and an emotive image of the Crucifixion to contemplate and pray over as part of their devotional practice.

The skilled stone-cutting and goldsmithing of this unique piece is echoed in other contemporary jewellery that has survived in collections, but is relatively rare in the corpus of archaeological finds. An exception is a metal-detected ring from Bolnhurst and Keysoe (Bedfordshire), now in the Ashmolean (Figure 2.4). This ring also dates to around 1400 and is unusu-

61 A trend discussed by Anne Lester in "Beyond the Borders, Outside the Frame: Translating Presence from Byzantium to the West after 1204," a paper presented at the 54th Annual Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Oxford, March 2023.

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ally set with a pyramidal cut garnet rather than a cabochon setting which was the norm until around the end of the fourteenth century. The pearls and attachment method are comparable to other examples of jewellery, such as pendants, but pearls are rare survivals in the archaeological record with them being subject to degradation in soils. The gold openwork letters of "A" and "M" on either side of the collet under the shoulders, most likely the monogram for *Ave Maria*, are unusual as most invocations to Mary or Christ are more simply inscribed on the hoops of rings.[62]

If the letters were an abbreviated invocation to the Virgin Mary, this prayer and the gold openwork form echoes the reliquary ring from Oxfordshire. Not only did the materials and skilled craftsmanship add value to the rings, but the pearls and the garnet on that from Bedfordshire were perceived to have particular virtues, for example, the garnet could protect its wearer from poison and vapours (i.e., the plague).[63] It was also associated with light and fire due to its colour, and as such the theological salvation of souls from darkness.[64] The facetted nature of the stone would have intensified this quality as the cut faces would catch sunlight, candlelight, or firelight as it was worn on the hand. The pearls too were symbols of purity, chastity, virginity, and heaven: such qualities or elements being synonymous with the Virgin Mary, thus strengthening the interpretation of the gold AM lettering standing for *Ave Maria*.[65] The elements made up an attractive, valuable, symbolic, protective, and emotionally charged piece of jewellery, providing the owner with reassuring feelings when they experienced anxiety or fear.

The complex features in the designs of rings and their material components—such as the multi-element bezel in which a piece of the True Cross was kept, the invocation to the Virgin combined with pearls and garnet, or even the form of Becket's mitre—contributed to heightened emotional experiences in the praxis of holy veneration.

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62 Such as a silver ring from Fyefield and Tubney (Oxfordshire) inscribed with +IHC NAZARENV. AM, AN2011.31.

63 Carbuncle or carbunculus is the medieval name used for the stone, and is discussed in Albertus Magnus' *De mineralibus*. Magnus and Wyckoff, *Book of Minerals*, bk. 2:ii, ch. 3; Evans and Serjeanston, *English Medieval Lapidaries.*

64 The light was not even extinguished at night. Evans, *Magical Jewels*, Appendix D, 227.

65 The pearl was known by its Latin name *margarita*, and was believed to be formed in shellfish by dew. The twelve gates of heaven were made of pearls. See Evans, *Magical Jewels*, 72, 146; Appendix D, 231; Book of Revelation 21:18–21.

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Reuse, Riddles, and Personal Identities

Amongst the garnets, pearls, sapphires, emeralds, and rubies, jewellers also reused gems originally carved in the ancient world. These old intaglios entered an organized and international trade network of Classical gems during the twelfth to fourteenth centuries and were reused in seal-rings and matrices.[66] Although the organized trade was significant, Roman objects could also have been encountered by medieval people in England and Wales while working in fields or robbing Roman stonework, for example. Even today, at least fifty loose Classical intaglio gems have been found by chance and recorded on the PAS, as have hundreds of Roman rings with or without their original intaglios.[67] Carved cameo gems were also reused, such as the Roman green chalcedony bust of a woman in a thirteenth-century gold claw setting found near Witney (Oxfordshire) in 1856.[68] Contemporary medieval intaglios and cameos copying the Classical style were also produced, revealing the influence on medieval craftsmen and the popularity of the forms.[69]

What was the appeal of these gems, and how were they manipulated in a later medieval context? The colours, images, and presumably relative novelty of the gems made them attractive; certainly the engraved nature of the gems was believed to increase their amuletic powers.[70] Finds of gold and silver seal-rings with inscriptions around the gems illuminate the recontextualization of the stones, but are rarer than the pendant-form seal matrices of precious- or base-metals set with the Classical gems.[71]

What were the interpretations of these Classical objects, and what role did they have in everyday experiences? Some of the Classical imagery could have been reinterpreted in the medieval period as either representing the individual owners of the seal matrices, or given Christian mean-

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

67 Recovering metal rings is not unexpected given the large-scale recovery of metal-detected finds, while the small, loose stone intaglio finds are more remarkable.

68 V&A, 646-1871.

69 See above for the impressed glass setting from London and notes 43 and 44. A ca. 1300 agate intaglio depicting a lion in the gold seal-ring of Artaut de Doyn is also recorded in Cherry, "The Rings," 42, no. 14; Campbell, "Gold, Silver and Precious Stones," 137–38.

70 Evans, *Medieval Jewels*, 94–95 and 118–20; Weill-Parot, "Imprinting Powers."

71 Medieval seal matrices tend to be one of two broad forms: flat with a pierced lug on the reverse; or conical with a pierced terminal. They have a central design and inscription on their face, usually added to the matrix by engraving. Reused intaglios are normally set in the flat form.

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ings. For example, a later thirteenth- to early fourteenth-century gold ring from Hereford (Herefordshire) that contained a first-century BCE sapphire intaglio carved with the Hellenistic depiction of a Ptolemaic queen's head in profile, could have been interpreted as the Virgin Mary.[72] This was surrounded by the retrograde-engraved inscription of "* TECTA: LEGE: LECTA: TEGE." (Read what is hidden, hide what is read) incorporating elements of secrecy that reiterated the role of the impressed wax seal. Other inscriptions of contemporary seal-rings similarly highlighted secrecy, for example, "+ EGO: SECRETA: TEGO" (I hide secrets). In the thirteenth century, personal names were often included to indicate the owner, such as "+SGILLV OSBERTTI" (Seal of Osbert) which surrounded a Roman chalcedony intaglio that depicted Jupiter—perhaps Osbert saw himself in the image.[73] When sealing a folded letter using one of these seal-rings, it may have led to feelings of reassurance that the private correspondence in the letter packet was protected from prying eyes, but also that the writer's identity was physically being sent with it in the form of the seal.[74] Upon receipt the recipient could feel curiosity, and the letter and wax seal could bring the writer to their mind's eye, perhaps generating feelings of love, sadness, or even emotions associated with gossip, such as curiosity. From the fifteenth-century Paston Letters we know that many aspects of a personal nature were written about and sealed (remains of the wax seals still visible on them), each with the potential to convey news and emotions of the writer, and to delight, amuse, upset, or frustrate the recipient.[75]

Other inscriptions on seal-rings are more intriguing, such as that found in 1760 which remained undeciphered until now. The reused first-century CE, carnelian intaglio in its later, gold ring setting was found near Sandal

72 V&A 89-1899. A gold seal matrix containing a medieval green jasper intaglio is carved with a similar image. Found by chance in Epwell (Oxfordshire) in 2015, now held in the Oxfordshire Museums Service, see Byard, *BERK-2A91CA*.

73 Henig, "The Re-use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios," fig. 7; BM, P&E AF 558, ring donated by Sir Augustus Wollaston Franks, early 1300s, gold with a late Roman sard intaglio carved with the bust of Jupiter or Hercules. For Osbert's silver ring, see Richardson, *KENT-FF33F7*.

74 Wax seals could have been used with letterlocking techniques, see Dambrogio et al., "The Spiral-Locked Letters."

75 Fenn and Greenwood, *Paston Letters*. For example, the robberies and destruction caused by the duke of Suffolk's men in Hallesdon (Norfolk) (no. 130), Margaret Paston expresses her anger in a letter to her son (no. 229), and there is a humorous description of a rabbit farmer in a letter to Lord Fitzwalter (no. 307).

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Figure 2.5. Sketch of the impression made by the intaglio set in the seal ring found near Sandal Castle. Drawing by the author. Adapted from photograph by Peter Guenzel in Estorick, *I Bought it at Christie's*.

Castle (West Yorkshire).[76] Its form suggests a manufacture date in the later thirteenth or early fourteenth century. The oval gem depicts a helmeted figure, holding a spear and leading a horse with its head turned towards its back (Figure 2.5), surrounded by the incomprehensible medieval Latin inscription: "+MANIA MENTITUR IANUA NOSTER EQUS." The enigmatic words are in fact a play on language and feature in contemporary manuscripts, including the collections of miscellaneous texts from Cerne Abbey and St. Peter's Abbotsbury (Dorset).[77] Versions of the riddle sometimes include the "answer," for example in the chapter on *rhetorica* in the early fourteenth-century copy of *Secretum philosophorum* in the British Library, which reads: "Mantica mentitur ianua noster equus, id est, malement porte nostre chival."[78]

76 Society of Antiquaries, *Minutes of Meeting*; described as a "cryptic inscription" in Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power*, 28–29, no. 36. The ring is now in a private collection; see Estorick, *I bought it at Christie's*.

77 For the later thirteenth-century Dorset manuscripts see *Miscellaneous, Cerne Abbey*, Cambridge, Trinity College, MS O.2.45, p. 3, and British Library, Cotton MS Cleopatra B.IX, fol. 17r as cited in Hunt, "Deliciae clericorum," 173. The Latin text is also included as a scribble at the end of Bede, *In epistolas catholicas*, in Cambridge, Trinity College, MS B.2.32, fol. 89r. See Hunt, "Deliciae clericorum," 162, no. 6 and Pantin, "A Medieval Collection of Latin and English Proverbs," 144, lx, for a variation on the riddle.

78 British Library, MS Additional 32622, fol. 14r as cited in Galloway, "The Rhetoric of Riddling," 75.

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French, the socially superior "language of culture" in the thirteenth century,[79] was the key to understanding the ring's inscription. When the Latin words *mantica mentitur* are translated into Old French, *malle* (bag) and *ment* (he lies), there is a play on words in the form of a homonym and it is read (or heard) as *malement* (i.e., badly, poorly, or with difficulty); *ianua* becomes *porte* and instead of meaning a door or gateway it is "he carries"; and *noster equ[u]s* translates simply to *notre cheval*—thus *malement porte notre cheval*. To the intellectual elite of the later thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, literate in Latin and French, the pun on the ring is "Our horse carries poorly," alluding to the gem's scene where the horse is led, rather than being ridden. While the image in the first century CE would have been valued for its depiction of one of the Dioscuri, in the medieval period the gem was combined with a text to create an intellectual amusement.[80] The ring may well have been a commission with the inscription chosen to work with the gem's imagery. The place of the ring in late medieval literary and intellectual culture not only came from its function to create a seal on documents (perhaps written by an occupant of Sandal Castle) but the Classical gem, and the play on language and words as well. Its medieval owner, and those viewing the impressed wax seal it produced, would have undoubtedly felt amusement by the clever wordplay, possibly superiority at having solved it, and a feeling of reassurance from the perceived amuletic power of the *sigilla*.

This ring provides an interesting case study for the life-biography of a Classical intaglio: from its carving and use as a seal in the Roman world; its recovery in the later Middle Ages; its likely commission by a literate elite member of English society; its use to seal personal documents (probably) at Sandal Castle; its loss, and recovery in the later eighteenth century; its role in antiquarian endeavours; the long-standing mystery over its inscription and meaning; to its subsequent purchase and entry into a private collection in the twentieth century. As a medieval seal-ring it provides material evidence of the social and intellectual activities of the English noble elite, and as an emotant it is physical evidence of their intellectual humour, curiosity, and joy experienced while sending and solving such a riddle.

In the sixteenth century, with the classical revival and developing vogue of collecting Classical sculpture and art, rings set with intaglios and cam-

79 Crane, "Social Aspects of Bilingualism," 103.

80 The identification of the twin may have been recognized in the medieval period too. A further play on words with *ianua* / *ianus* and the Dioscuri could also have been perceived.

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eos experienced a resurgence in popularity, after an apparent decline in the fifteenth century. Intaglio-set ring-forms appealed not only to the laity, but also to the religious elite. For example, a reworked first-century CE green plasma intaglio engraved with the head of Minerva was reset in an elaborate episcopal ring of Bishop Gardiner (d. 1555).[81] Imitation cameos and intaglios were also produced, such as the fine, sixteenth-century gold ring set with a carnelian carved with a male bust excavated from London City ditch,[82] or contemporary cameos found in a unique hoard of jewellery at Cheapside in the City of London.

Hoarding Rings During Emotional Experiences

Known as the 'Cheapside Hoard' after its findspot, the hoard dates to the early seventeenth century and is interpreted as being the stock of a goldsmith. Almost five hundred jewels survived burial and discovery, and they include the everyday jewellery of the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, but also items of great rarity, value, and of the finest quality.[83] Almost half of the rings in the hoard had rosette-style settings of emeralds and garnets around a larger raised central stone or a pearl,[84] while others were set with diamonds, rubies, garnets, sapphires, amethysts, moonstones, cat's-eyes, enamels, and Roman intaglios. The jewels provide evidence of the world-wide networks of Elizabethan trade, gem-cutting skills, goldsmithing, and fashionable styles of jewellery. It is not known exactly when the hoard was hidden or why, but it was probably buried by one of the many goldsmiths who worked and sold their wares in Cheapside sometime around or after 1640, and perhaps at a time of peril.

Tumultuous events or the threat of danger are often considered reasons for hoarding possessions with the intention for retrieval when safe to do so. The pogroms in the fourteenth century on mainland Europe are seen as the cause of the hoarding of coins, with or without ritual and secular metalwork, by persecuted Jewish communities.[85] In England, no such Black Death

81 Found in his tomb in Winchester Cathedral, now part of their treasury.

82 Henig, "An Intaglio Ring."

83 Forsyth, *London's Lost Jewels*. The Cheapside Hoard is held in the LM.

84 Forsyth, *London's Lost Jewels*, 167.

85 The most famous hoards are the "Black Death treasures" in the region that is now Germany. See Descatoire, *Treasures of the Black Death*; Stürzebecher, "Jewish Wedding Rings."

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treasures exist due to the expulsion of Jewish communities in 1290. Nevertheless, finger-rings and other jewellery are recovered from later medieval British hoards, although they are found in relatively low numbers and usually accompany coinage.[86] The value of the rings made them worth hiding, whether it be the value of their materials and/or the meanings ascribed to them by their owners.

One of the periods of peril in the later medieval period which may be the cause of some of the hoarding of small parcels of objects was the Reformation. Small groups of coins and jewellery that were offerings to shrines, or even relics themselves, could have been secretly taken and hidden before the destruction and stripping of assets by Thomas Cromwell, and such occurrences are recorded.[87] I have reassessed the hoard found near Notley Abbey, near Thame, and suggested that it was deposited at the Dissolution of the monasteries in the late 1530s, rather than a date in the 1460s during the Wars of the Roses as previously argued.[88] The reliquary ring (see Figure 2.3) was found with ten silver coins (all groats) and four other gold rings. These were a fifteenth-century posy ring inscribed with *tout pour vous*; a large stirrup-shaped ring set with a toadstone in a four-cusped collet with an open back allowing it to touch the skin; a smaller stirrup-shaped ring set with a turquoise cabochon; and another large late fourteenth- to fifteenth-century ring whose shoulders are decorated with pairs of panels engraved with floral and leaf motifs, set with a flat, hexagonally faceted peridot in a six-cusped collet, at its back is a quatrefoil hole allowing the stone to touch the wearer's skin. They formed a small parcel that could have been easily buried at a memorable location, and was made up of items that were commonly offered to shrines. For example, at Thomas Becket's shrine in Canterbury, jewels, including rings, were offered and even attached to the shrine, and the 1520 inventory of Lincoln Cathedral includes a reliquary ring that contained a piece of the True Cross and inscribed *Ecce lignum* which had been dedicated to the shrine of St. Hugh.[89]

86 Coins provide a *terminus post quem* for the deposition date of a hoard, based on the latest minting date.

87 See Standley, "Hid in the Earth."

88 See Standley, "Hid in the Earth" for the reassessment. For the earlier interpretation see Evans et al., "A Hoard of Gold Rings."

89 See Standley, "Hid in the Earth"; Blick, "Votives, Images, Interaction," 48–51; Wilkinson, "'Is Still Not the Blood of the Blessed Martyr Thomas Fully Avenged?'"; Evans, *Magical Jewels*, 136.

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I have argued that the rings and coins found in the hoard near Thame were rescued from the shrine of Our Lady at the Chapel of St. Anne at Caversham (Berkshire) (a dependent of Notley Abbey) before Thomas Cromwell's Commissioners arrived in September 1538. They were then taken and returned to Notley (ca. 30 miles from Caversham) before being buried nearby in the hope of retrieval, but this never happened. Each piece, including the coins, held devotional, protective, and emotional meanings. These would have accumulated during their lives creating palimpsests of meaning and emotions: as personal possessions worn on the body, the rings would have been associated with protecting the wearer from ills through the magical properties of the stones and the invocation to the Lord and the True Cross relic, and thus feelings of relief and reassurance; the reliquary ring would have been used to practice affective devotion; the posy ring was also connected to feelings of devotion and love to a person and/or Christ. When given as offerings to the shrine they may have induced the devotees' relief from feelings of pain, elation that they could soon be healed, or thankfulness for being saved from a threat, such as a storm at sea.[90] When they were seen by other pilgrims on the shrine, feelings of ecstasy and awe could have been triggered by the sight of it and its adornments (and eagerness to make offerings of their own, as was hoped for by the monks).[91] When the rings and coins were rescued and taken back to Notley Abbey, the fear of being caught and the offerings destroyed would have been acute. At the moment of burial, the circumstances would have generated emotions of fear, trepidation, despair, and sorrow. Due to the importance and association of the offerings with the shrine of Our Lady in Caversham and the True Cross, the objects could have intensified these feelings.

The case reveals the curation of material culture and how the rings and coins, although of different monetary values, were imbued with comparable cultic properties and emotional significance by devotees who offered them, and the monks who curated and subsequently rescued these treasures.

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90 A sea captain is recorded as giving a ring to the shrine of Becket after being saved from a storm.

91 See Blick, "Votives, Images, Interaction," 54–55.

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Conclusions

This chapter has considered the limitations but also the potential of the archaeological record of later medieval and early modern finger-rings. These small finds were personal possessions and through their materials, imagery, inscriptions, symbolism, and provenance they can illuminate a variety of the lived experiences of the objects themselves, and their owners.

The rings can evoke vivid connections with people in the past due to their closeness to the physical body and their roles as emotants. On the whole, the people who wore the rings that have survived are those of whom we rarely have corresponding information about from historical sources. Additionally, the types of rings depicted in medieval and early modern illustrations do not fully represent the range and number of rings that were worn in the past. For example, the pewter devotional rings, or the glass moulded settings are missing from artistic depictions. Indeed, we do not even know the real materials of the rings in paintings—what appears to be a gold ring set with a red gem may have in fact been silver-gilt or gilt copper alloy with a red glass setting. Thus, archaeological evidence is vital to understand the objects of the past.

The case studies highlighted here show the variety of themes and other evidence that the archaeological rings can connect to, such as craftsmanship, betrothal and wedding practices, political and social upheaval, religious devotion and persecution, magical practices, literacy, antiquarian activities, and the history of collecting. What is also evident from the examples discussed, is the need of those studying rings to consider a range of available evidence and sources and other types of material culture, to fully contextualize and interpret the finger-rings. It is also important to consider that the rings (or their settings) may have had long use-lives, having been curated by individuals or institutions, bequeathed through generations, recycled, lost, re-found and reused, or remained hidden for centuries.

While wearing rings may have been an everyday action and became a usual feature of someone's dress, the experiences that the rings were part of were often emotional and significant. The rings were not just witnesses to the experiences, but they were characterized by emotion in the relationships and the circumstances that people experienced. As more rings are recovered and recorded through excavation and as chance finds, our understanding of the variety of types, meanings, their significance to their past owners, and their place in wider social events will continue to develop.

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Chapter 3

CHANGING HANDS

ON THE USES, MEANING, AND CIRCULATION OF RINGS AMONGST THE IBERIAN NOBILITY FROM THE ELEVENTH TO THE THIRTEENTH CENTURY

INÉS CALDERÓN MEDINA

RINGS ARE SMALL objects used for personal adornment, typically made from valuable materials such as gold, silver, and precious stones. During the Middle Ages, the elite used part of their wealth to acquire distinct types of jewels and other luxury items. As Laurent Feller has discussed, their ownership and display provided an indispensable means of demonstrating and underscoring their rank and power.[1] The intrinsic value of a ring's metals and precious stones, their colour, exoticism, beauty, and healing properties, served as a symbol of status for its wearer.[2] Thus, they provided a mark of distinction capable of underscoring a hierarchical relationship between individuals.[3] The wearing of rings as a means of highlighting social distinction was reinforced from the thirteenth century onwards when the Iberian monarchs drew up a succession of sumptuary laws restricting the wearing of adornments made from gold, silver, and precious stones to the monarchs, their families, and the nobility.[4]

1 Feller, "Formes et fonctions," 5.

2 González Arce, *Apariencia y poder*, 66–69.

3 Renou, "Rings of Power," 22.

4 González Arce, *Apariencia y poder*, 79–84.

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From the eleventh century onwards, the nobility had begun to extend their kinship networks across the various Iberian kingdoms. They also contributed to the expansion of the military campaign against Islamic forces, which culminated in the major advances made in the second half of the thirteenth century.[5] This process of expansion permitted noblemen and women to acquire greater wealth, which they used to form collections of possessions intended for public display. The latter went on to form part of their respective family treasuries, and subsequently circulated generation after generation amongst the extended family, moving beyond kingdoms' frontiers. But these objects could also easily be used as a financial resource in times of need.[6]

Some of these valuable objects had a sentimental value because they had been owned by specific ancestors, or else as a result of how they were acquired—aspects that are also studied by Mariah Proctor-Tiffany in her analysis of late medieval royal French documents in Chapter 1 of this volume. These precious items played a role in constructing a family's identity and collective memory as well.[7] With regard to rings, some possessed a major symbolic value for the nobility because they represented and publicly displayed the powerful alliances and family ties established between different kinship networks through the ritual of canonical marriage, which at that time was both the monarch's and nobility's principal means of establishing kinship ties and securing a dominant social position.

Rings could also attain a further special relevance for the nobility because they were ascribed an almost sacred or magical value because they once belonged to a saint or were adorned with stones renowned for their curative properties. These rings could be used for healing in the event of illness. Others were used to guarantee the salvation of kinsmen and kins-

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5 Calderón Medina, "Extensión de las redes," 11–17; Calderón Medina, *Los Soverosa*, 24–249.

6 Garcia Marsilia, "Vestit i aparença," 643. There are numerous testimonies of orders being issued to sell, pawn, or melt down metal rings in order to obtain instant liquidity. In 1296, the Leonese pawnbroker, Fernan Iohanes, held two rings as a deposit guaranteeing loans he had provided. Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, doc. 566.

7 Queen Isabella of Portugal, wife of King Denis, wrote a letter to her brother Jaime II of Aragon between 1302 and 1313 in which she thanked him for having sent a very fine precious stone that had belonged to their mother, Constance of Sicily, because although she had many stones: "deseiava aaver muyto algua cousa das que minha madre tragia" (she greatly longed to have something that their mother had worn). Antunes Rodrigues, *Rainha Santa*, doc. 35.

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women's souls, and they also provided a means of commemorating the lives of family members; they were often bequeathed or donated to ecclesiastical institutions where family members were buried and where their souls were prayed for.[8]

In this chapter, I seek to analyze the significance rings embodied for the Iberian aristocracy, as well as the various ways in which they were used. To this end, I adopt a cross-border perspective, as these jewels circulated widely amongst family members—both consanguineous and affinal, and men and women—as well as members of the laity and clergy across all the Iberian kingdoms. To obtain a multifaceted socio-historical understanding of rings, it is essential to draw upon a range of legal, artistic, and literary sources, as well as chronicles, from across the Iberian kingdoms during the period spanning the eleventh to the thirteenth century.

Rings in Iberian Sources

A considerable number of the documents concerning the nobility in the Iberian kingdoms are conserved in cathedral and monastic archives. Here, I will use charter editions that have been published for the kingdoms of Portugal, León, Galicia, Castile, Aragon, Mallorca, and the Catalan counties, which cover the period from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. Despite the immense number of documents covering an extensive region and lengthy period, we find few references to rings, and the majority of items made from precious metals that are referred to were liturgical objects.[9]

Ana Rodríguez has detected an uneven trend in citing valuable objects in charters, one that varied depending on the context, date, and value attrib-

8 Documents record numerous donations of rings, *pro remedio anima*, to institutions chosen as a personal or family burial place. Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the Traba were the most powerful family in Galicia. Pedro Froilaz de Traba (1086–1126), who was buried in the Cathedral of Santiago de Compostela, served as *ayo* (tutor) to the future Alfonso VII, and then his son Fernando Pérez de Traba, Count of Galicia, took over this role from 1121 onwards, and went on to serve as *ayo* to the future Fernando II of León. Fernando Pérez de Traba died circa 1160 and like his father he was buried in the Cathedral. López San Gil, *La nobleza altomedieval gallega*, 76–100. In 1169 his daughter, María Fernández de Traba, requested to be buried with her father, as did her sister Urraca in 1199, and they each donated a gold ring to the archbishop for the salvation of their souls. Souto Cabo, *Os cavaleiros que fizeram*, docs. 7, 24.

9 Duran-Porta, "L'anell com a signe," 252; Rodríguez, "À propos des objets nécesaires," 63–75.

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uted to the chattel in question.[10] She has stated that during the second half of the tenth century there are an increasing number of references to precious objects due to their arrival from the Islamic south following the fall of the Caliphate of Cordoba, the payment of *parias* (tributes paid by Muslims), and an increased circulation of precious metals. Then, over the course of the eleventh century, there is a gradual fall in the number of references made to valuable objects, and they are almost absent from twelfth-century documents. Rodríguez has linked this change to a conceptual shift regarding the value ascribed to objects, whereby they ceased to be referred to in dower letters.[11] From the thirteenth century onwards, however, there is a renewed and significant rise in the number of references made to precious objects in documents, and Rodríguez has argued that this was due to the economic growth witnessed during this period and the arrival of precious metals and artifacts from the recently conquered southern Iberian regions, on occasions in the form of booty.[12]

Major challenges beset any enquiry into the quantity and quality of objects owned by the nobility, because we do not know whether certain types of documents, such as dower letters or major betrothal contracts, registered all the chattels exchanged between spouses. Neither is it clear from wills if they list all the objects owned by the testator,[13] nor whether rings formed part of the testator's obviated property. Notwithstanding these circumstances, an analysis of individual documents does shed some light onto the importance attached to rings.

The documents from the Galician monastery of Montederramo reveal that at least one ring formed part of the property that the Galician noblewoman, María Méndez, presented to the monastery's abbot in October 1281, and the documents concerning her donation state that it included "que todas llas outras cousas que eu, así mobli como raýx, que eu non posesse en este testamento" (all the other things, both chattels and real estate, that I did not include in this will).[14] Some months later, in July 1282, her servant Teresa Martins, declared to the abbot, María's *manumisor*,[15] that he possessed a gold ring with the inscription AVE MARIA that had been delivered

10 Rodríguez, "À propos des objets nécesaires," 78–88.

11 Rodríguez, "Objets sous contrainte," 88–89.

12 Rodríguez, "Narrating the Treasury," 61–80.

13 Rodríguez, "Endettement et circulation des richesses," 3.

14 Lorenzo, *Mosteiro de Montederramo*, doc. 413.

15 The individual(s) who the deceased chose to carry out the terms of their will.

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to him, but which María Méndez had ordered to be given to her following her death.[16] Aside from being made of gold, the ring is important because its inscription gave it an apotropaic power with which María Méndez wanted to protect her servant Teresa.[17] For a reason that remains unclear María Méndez made no mention of the ring in her will, although seemingly she spoke to the abbot about her wishes that it be left to Teresa, for whom she felt great affection; she was one of three servants to whom she left a number of personal items.

This is just one example of the many rings that were not mentioned in the documents analyzed over the course of this study. These sources may well adhere to the model identified by Ana Rodríguez, yet they may also offer us a biased image of how rings were used, because only the gold and silver ones are mentioned by members of the upper social strata, and no mention is made of the copper or bronze rings found in archaeological excavations, which were more accessible to the lower social strata.[18]

The rings encountered in eleventh-century documents issued in the western kingdoms belonged to bishops and abbots. By contrast, rings were not objects that typically formed part of the recorded property owned by the lay nobility during the eleventh century, at least in the western kingdoms, where no records for noble ownership have been found. The Catalan sources are more eloquent, although far fewer rings were owned by the Catalan counts than those used by members of the clergy.[19] The treasury that may have contained the highest number of rings was that owned by the frontier

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16 In 1282 Teresa Martiz declared that she had received a gold ring from the Abbot of Montederramo: “a qual sortella mandou a min dona María Meéndiz, moller que ffoy d’Airas Pérez Farpas de Burel, a tenpo de seu pasamento” (this ring was ordered to be given to me by Dona Maria Meéndiz at the time of her passing, who was the wife of Airas Pérez Farpas de Burel). Lorenzo, *Mosteiro de Montederramo*, doc. 426.

17 Gilchrist, *Sacred Heritage*, 116–21.

18 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 51–52. For the non-elite, see Chapter 2 in this volume.

19 Duran-Porta, “L’anell com a signe,” 253. Records for the presence of sixty-five rings in Catalonia have been traced, two thirds of which were owned by ecclesiastics and only three were owned by counts. A further three rings owned by counts have been identified: Count Armengol of Urgell gave two rings to the bishops of Barcelona and Girona respectively prior to 1041, Rodríguez Bernal, *Col.lecció diplomàtica del Archivo Ducal de Cardona*, doc. 133; and a further ring was owned by Bernat Joan, lord of Ogassa and Clusa. Baiges et al., *Els pergamins de l’Arxiu comtal de Barcelona*, doc. 245. See also Sanjosé i Llongueras, *Esments d’orfebreria*, table 8 with 128 rings, of which fifty-six were without specification, two were made of silver, twenty-six of gold, and forty-four were of gold set with gems.

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magnate Arnau Mir de Tost. Its inventory lists *multos anulos ex auro* (many gold rings), but their number is not given.[20] Scarcer still are records of rings owned or worn by women during the eleventh century, although Arsenda d'Àger, Arnau's wife, owned a number of gold rings, which she listed in the will she drew up in 1068.[21] Furthermore, Ermesenda de Carcasona (992–1057) may have used her chalcedony signet ring to seal documents.[22]

During the twelfth century, only a small number of rings appear in charters. The Leonese nobility used gold rings to purchase immovable property. In 1112 Pedro Negro presented an *anillo de oro preciosisimo* (a most precious gold ring) to Queen Urraca, as a formal acknowledgment, *in roboratorio*, to consolidate the queen's donation of the Monastery of San Juan de Baños.[23] The ring permitted the queen to replenish her coffers in the midst of the war she was fighting against her husband Alfonso I of Aragon.[24] Even though mentions of rings are rare, it is apparent that by the end of the twelfth century some women from the upper tier of the nobility possessed an important number of rings, for example Urraca Fernández de Traba owned a jewellery collection that included at least five valuable rings.[25]

Over the course of the thirteenth century, an increasing number of references to rings are recorded in the sources. Wills, dowry contracts or dower letters, inventories of chattels, lawsuits, and donations refer to or describe a range of types of rings in greater detail. In addition, there is a noticeable increase in the number of rings that formed part of the royal treasury,[26] as well in the personal treasuries kept by noblemen and women, such as the Byzantine princess, Vataça Láscaris, who had five impressive rings, some of which were decorated with diamonds.[27] During this period of territorial

20 Chesé Lapeña, *Col.lecció diplomàtica de Sant Pere d'Àger*, doc. 89. The document is dated to after 1068.

21 Chesé Lapeña, *Col.lecció diplomàtica de Sant Pere d'Àger*, doc. 87.

22 Duran-Porta, "L'anell com a signe," 255; Martin, "Glimpses of Gold," 201–14.

23 A gift made *in roboratorio* to a donor was used to symbolically acknowledge and consolidate a donation, in this case of land and property.

24 Ruiz Albi, *La reina doña Urraca (1109–1126): Cancillería y documentación diplomática*, doc. 65; Martínez Sopena, "La circulation," 262–66.

25 Souto Cabo, *Os cavaleiros que fizeram*, doc. 24. She was married to Juan Arias, *ayo* to Alfonso IX de León, and she drew up her will in 1199.

26 On the creation of the Portuguese royal treasury and the rings that formed part of it, see Rodrigues, "Monedas, armas y objetos suntuarios," 439–60.

27 Vataça Làscaris, daughter of Eulogia Láscaris, arrived in Portugal in 1285 as part of the entourage of Queen Isabella of Portugal, wife of Denis I. She married Martín Gil

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expansion and increasing wealth, the lower tier of the nobility, represented by the *milites*, began to imitate the upper elite's ways of life and appearance by acquiring clothes, rings, and other jewels as symbols of their status.[28] Likewise, the urban burghers who profited from urban growth did the same.[29]

Not only are rings mentioned more frequently in the written sources from this period, the thirteenth century also heralded the first artistic depictions of them, for example in sculptures and lyric texts, which indicates that these items of personal adornment were becoming more widely used in society. Two sociocultural factors would have contributed to this change: firstly, the increasing circulation of precious metals and stones, which occurred in line with the Christians' advance against Islam in Iberia, and, secondly, the consolidation of canonical marriage established by the Fourth Lateran Council.

The summary descriptions of rings shed light on the materials they were made of, their form, decoration, weight, value, and on occasions their provenance through references to their origin, changes in ownership, or use. Sporadic references are also made to the rings' disappearance, having been melted down and converted into liturgical objects.[30] But, as Julie Renou

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de Soverosa and having been left a widow, she moved to Castile as *aya* (governess) to Constance of Portugal, Ferdinand IV's wife. She formed a rich jewellery collection, whose most noteworthy objects were a crown and five rings: a silver ring with a cornelian, a gold ring with a diamond, a gold ring decorated with an emerald and a small ruby, a silver ring set with jasper, and another gold ring with a cornelian. Coelho and Ventura, "Os bens da Vataça" 68–69. On her life, see, Cruz Coelho and Ventura, "Vataça: Uma dona," 159–93; Duran Duelt, "Sobre la demanda"; Calderón Medina, *Los Soverosa*, 174–79.

28 Rodríguez, "Endettement et circulation des richesses," 5–6, where the concern about appearance is linked to the circulation of ideals of chivalry. González Arce, *Apariencia y poder*, 142–52.

29 García Marsilla, "Vestit i aparença," 622; González Arce, *Apariencia y poder*, 79–84. In addition to the rings that Fernan Iohanes received as a guarantee for the loans he provided, he owned two gold rings for personal use, and he bequeathed them to his children in the will he drew up in 1296. Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, doc. 566.

30 Certain rings were donated to be melted down in order to create new liturgical objects. The conversion of rings into liturgical objects bestowed a new significance on these objects through their new use, as it brought them into contact with divinity, and this also provided spiritual benefits for their original owner. See Buc, "Conversion of Objects," 99–143. This practice increased from the thirteenth century onwards, and on occasions members of the laity handed over their jewels to provide their religious foundations with liturgical objects. In 1307, Teresa Gil de Riba de Vizela founded Sancti Spiritus de Toro (kingdom of León). Her will stipulated that a

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has discussed, there are major gaps in our knowledge about certain aspects of the use of rings, such as how many of them there were exactly, whether certain rings were used for specific occasions or ceremonies, and whether others were used on a daily basis.[31] A deeper understanding of the use and significance of the rings worn by women and men during the central centuries of the Iberian Middle Ages may be gained by drawing on the information provided by artistic and literary representations in conjunction with the data recorded in chronicles.

Rings as Symbols of Matrimony

Amongst the recently restored polychrome sculptures in the cloister of Burgos Cathedral, the statue of a king holding a small ring stands out (Figure 3.1). The ring is the key protagonist of the scene. Clearly visible between the thumb and index finger, the gold item is presented to a queen who elegantly holds the tassel of her mantle in her left hand. This gold painted ring was imbued with an immensely powerful symbolic and political value, because it was part of a consciously designed sculptural programme at the cloister of Burgos Cathedral. Alfonso X designed this propagandistic programme for the wedding of his son and heir to the throne—the Infante Ferdinand—and Blanche, daughter of Louis of France, which was held in the cathedral on November 30, 1269.[32]

The male figure represents Alfonso's father Ferdinand III (1217–1230), who hands a ring, perhaps adorned with a large diamond, to his wife Beatrice of Swabia (also known as Elisabeth, 1205–1235). The latter king and his wife were married in the same cathedral, also on the Feast of St. Andrew, fifty years before his grandson's wedding. It was not by chance that the date and place chosen by Alfonso X for the marriage of his heir were the same, nor that he should decide to decorate the cloister with sculptures depicting the symbolic moment of Ferdinand III's marriage to his wife. The heir to Castile would have to pass in front of these sculptures on his way to the altar for his own wedding. The ring played a crucial role in the parallel that Alfonso X sought to establish between the Infante Ferdinand and Blanche and the sculptures of Ferdinand III and Queen Beatrice: the new spouses

cross be made for the church using her gold rings and precious stones. Rouquoi, "Le testament de doña Teresa Gil," 316.

31 Renou, "Rings of Power," 18

32 Hernández, "Two Weddings," 417.

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Figure 3.1. Sculptures representing Ferdinand III and Beatrice of Swabia, second half of the thirteenth century. Burgos Cathedral. Photo by the Cabildo de la Catedral de Burgos. Used with permission.

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represented the continuity of the marriage that had founded the Christian monarchy, which had managed to unify the kingdoms of León and Castile in 1230 and had also forged a consanguineous tie to the imperial dynasty.[33] Furthermore, both marriages extolled the values of canonical marriage that was then being implemented in Castile.

The Church had begun to define and regulate sacramental marriage in the eleventh century, but the Fourth Lateran Council held in 1215 played a fundamental role in this process. The council stipulated how the canonical marriage ceremony should be performed, including the exchange of rings between the spouses.[34] It is unclear where or when rings first began to be used in the different types of marriage rituals.[35] A number of European testimonies have been traced for the blessing of the ring at the spouses' house during the eleventh century, and these are complemented by a number of thirteenth-century mentions of this blessing being held in front of the church where the wedding was due to take place.[36] Some references to marriage from the Iberian kingdoms are presented here.[37] The *Chronica Adephonsi imperatoris* describes the wedding of Alfonso VII of León's daughter and García of Navarra, held in León in 1144, in some detail. Yet the chronicle remains silent on any church celebration that may have included the exchange of rings, nor makes any mention of a ring amongst the property received by the bride.[38] Over a century later, when the Lateran Council's instructions were being implemented, Alfonso X's fourth *Partida* ruled that a ring could be given during the betrothal ceremony as a symbol of the promise of a future marriage.[39] And in the third *Partida* he stipulated that following the words of consent, "it is customary in some countries for the husband to take his wife by the hand, and place rings upon her fingers, as a token that the marriage ceremony is finished and complete."[40]

33 Hernández, "Two Weddings," 417.

34 Gaudemet, *Le mariage en Occident*, 139–49

35 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 38–39

36 Gaudemet, *Le mariage en Occident*, 227.

37 A detailed discussion of regional marriage practices is beyond the scope of this article.

38 Maya Sánchez, "Chronica Adephonsi imperatoris," LI, 91–98, 191–94.

39 *Las siete partidas del rey Alfonso X el Sabio*, IV Partida, Título I, ley II. "Es quandol mete algunt aniello en el dedo diciendo así: yo te do este aniello en señal que casaré contigo" ("When he puts a ring on her finger, saying: 'I give you this ring as a token that I will marry you'"). For the English translation, see *Las siete partidas*, trans. Parson Scott and ed. Burns, 4:879.

40 *Las siete partidas del rey Alfonso X el Sabio*, III Partida, Ley LXXXV. "Acostumbran

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Despite the symbolism of the nuptial ring, there are very few testimonies to its use by the nobility as part of their marriage celebrations. But some evidence is provided by twelfth-century Catalan betrothal contracts, which often included eloquent preambles on the tradition of presenting rings as part of marriage celebrations, both as an element of betrothal rituals,[41] and for the exchange of rings during the marriage ceremony. In 1111 Berenguer Guadall, who belonged to the mid-ranking frontier nobility, recounts in his betrothal contracts how having agreed to marry his future spouse, Elvira—the daughter of a merchant from Barcelona, Ricard Guillem[42]—they exchanged rings as a sign of the legitimate marriage between them.[43] He also gave her the tenth part of his property. Although the document narrates the exchange of rings in the ceremony, the ring involved was not listed in the inventory of chattels he presented to his wife. Nor was this done for other Catalan betrothal or dowry contracts during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, although these documents listed the real estate given to the wife in addition to various domestic and luxury items.[44]

The documentary evidence concerning the exchange of marriage goods from the western kingdoms is still less eloquent. The extant dowry contracts or dower letters along with the betrothal contracts from the tenth to the

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en algunas tierras de tomar al marido por la mano a su muger y meterle en los dedos los anillos en señal que es hecho y consumado el matrimonio" ("it is customary in some countries for the husband to take his wife by the hand, and place rings upon her fingers, as a token that the marriage ceremony is finished and complete"). *Las siete partidas*, trans. Parson Scott and ed. Burns, 3:738.

41 In 1104 Guillem gave the tenth part of his estates in the counties of Roselló, Perelada, and Ampúrias to Beatriz as a betrothal gift. The letter's preamble reads: "Prischa legum iura et universa ordo doxorum sancti auctoritas ut in celebrandis nuptiis arrarum anuli de sponsalicii et ad ultimum quod necminus est libellum dotis a viri celebriter sociandis tradutur coniugius ut iuxta divinum eloquium." Baiges et al., *Els pergamins de l'Arxiu comtal de Barcelona*, doc. 348

42 Son of Guadal II, who belonged to the Centelles family, who had resided in the castle of San Esteve de Centellas since the time of Carlos Martel. See Ruiz Doménec, *Ricar Guillem*, 119–20.

43 The document is dated January 25, 1111: "Inter nos annulus arrarum tradidimus." Baiges et al., *Els pergamins de l'Arxiu comtal de Barcelona*, doc. 407.

44 No reference to rings has been found in the six charters of pledge conserved in Sant Joan de les Abadesses, which are dated to between 1182 and 1273; Ferrer i Godoy, *Diplomatari del Monestir de Sant Joan de les Abadesses*. Nor has any mention of rings been traced in the nuptial contracts conserved in the Monastery of Santa María de les Franqueses, dated between 1165 and 1271. Escuder, *Diplomatari de Santa Maria de les Franqueses*.

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thirteenth century for the kingdom of León make no mention of any rings. Paternal dowries often refer to the real estate parents gave to their daughter, as well as textiles, tableware and on a very few occasions, a number of objects of personal adornment.[45] Likewise, dower letters tend to record the estates that the parents gave to their daughter when she married, and on occasions they refer to the luxury garments and domestic items the wife received, but they make no mention of any rings.[46]

From the thirteenth century onwards, there are an increasing number of artistic representations of betrothal and marriage ceremonies, both visual and textual,[47] that feature rings. Yet there is no corresponding refer-

45 In the late tenth century, Jimena, wife of Munio Fernández, gave his daughter, Urraca, a dowry including numerous estates, textiles, and some items of personal adornment, including five brooches and some gold pendants. Fernández Flórez and Herrero de la Fuente, *Colección documental del monasterio de Otero de las Dueñas*, doc. 50. In 1156, Jimena's kinswoman, Maria Froilaz, provided her daughters with numerous estates, luxury textiles, silver tableware, and five gold brooches for their dowry, but no ring. Fernández Flórez and Herrero de la Fuente, *Colección documental del monasterio de Otero de las Dueñas*, doc. 352. These women belonged to the Flaínez family, who originally, in the tenth century, lived in the mountain regions of León. The family's power grew during the eleventh century. They were made the Counts of León and were appointed to the principal court posts up until the first half of the thirteenth century. The kinswomen of the Flaínez family founded the Cistercian Monasteries of Sandoval, Santa María de Carrizo, and Otero de las Dueñas. See Martínez Sopena, "Prolis Flainiz," 69–102.

46 No reference to any rings has been found in the fifteen charters of pledge dated between 1114 and 1127 conserved in the female monastery of Gradefes (Burón Castro, *Colección documental del monasterio de Gradefes*), nor in the twenty-two charters dated between 1191 and 1262 for the female monastery of Carrizo, see Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*. Likewise, no references to rings are to be found in the twelve diplomas dated to between 1129 and 1260, which are conserved in the archive of the female Monastery of Otero de las Dueñas (see Fernández Flórez and Herrero de la Fuente, *Colección documental del monasterio de Otero de las Dueñas*), nor in a charter from the Monastery of Trianos dated 1130 (Fuente Crespo, *Colección documental del monasterio de Trianos*. There are no charters of pledge, nor dowries amongst the archival documents conserved for the Cistercian Monasteries of Sandoval, San Esteban de Nogales, and Santa María de Moreruela. Herrero Jiménez, *Colección documental del monasterio de Villaverde de Sandoval*; Cavero Domínguez, *Colección Documental del Monasterio de San Esteban de Nogales*; Alfonso Antón, *La colonización*.

47 The forty-second *Cantiga de Santa María* depicts the presentation of the spouses' rings and signals their value as a symbol of the indissolubility of marriage. The scene recounted took place in Germany. The youthful protagonist receives a ring from his spouse during the betrothal ceremony: "andava í namorado i e tragía séu anél/ que sa amiga lle déra i que end'e éra natural" (He wore a ring which his beloved, a native

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ence to these items in the extant dowry contracts, dower letters and nuptial contracts drawn up for the Iberian nobility, even though—as the case of Berenguer Guadall suggests—they were used in ceremonies. The evidence assessed here allows us to conclude that nuptial rings were linked to marriage rituals, and that their value was principally symbolic, signifying a contract, sacrament, affection, or a combination of these aspects. The economic value of these rings was a secondary factor, which explains why they were not listed in the documents that record the property exchanged between the spouses. But there can be no doubt that the value and quality of the materials used to make these rings converted them into a highly significant element of public display that demonstrated both spouses' social and economic status, and thereby evoked the prosperity of their future marriage.

Teneatis vobis hunc anulum: Rings as Gifts Outside of Marriage?

In theory, marriage was indissoluble, a characteristic that was not attributed to any other type of secular union between men and women, such as concubinage. My analysis of the extant concubinage contracts has revealed no references to any rings. Yet, there is evidence for a number of highly significant lawsuits for the legitimation of individuals claiming to be the sons of the kings of Aragon, and these documents state that following sporadic sexual relationships with certain women the king gave them a ring.

An enquiry was undertaken to annul the paternity claim made by Juan Benet de Daroca, who was born following a relationship between his mother Muñina and Pedro III of Aragon circa 1270. During this enquiry one of the witnesses, a presbyter from Daroca, stated that having spent the night with the woman, the king gave her a ring.[48] Later, in 1319 as part of the lawsuit to legitimize Napoleón, who was claimed to be the son of Jaime II, his mother Gerolda gave a detailed account of the night she spent with the monarch on May 15, 1287. Bidding farewell to her, the king gave her a gold ring decorated with gold stones, and she in turn asked him to remember her.[49] The two men, Juan and Napoleón, were acknowledged as the sons of Peter II

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of that town, had given him); see www.cantigasdesantamaria.com/csm/42 and *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X*, 55. See also Disalvo, "Esponsales drudaria y amor virginal," 161–78.

48 Cingolani, "Monarcas infieles," 281: "dederat eidem tunc unum anulum."

49 Cingolani, "Monarcas infieles," 286: "Ipseque dominus rex dixit eidem: 'Itote cum Deo,' deditque sibi anulum aureum cum lapide coloris viridis, dixitque sibi: 'Teneatis vobis hunc anulum.'"

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and Jaime II respectively, because the women and witnesses' accounts were considered truthful. It is unknown how Muñina and Gerolda used the rings, although they could have worn them, as one witness stated they had seen Gerolda's ring; undoubtedly, a gold ring with precious stones on the hand of lower strata woman would have been striking.

It is challenging to interpret the precise significance of the rings these kings gave to these two women, both of whom were married, although their husbands had been absent for many years. The presentation of a ring could have been a gift, a display of *largitas regia*, but it could also be considered as a form of compensation for a carnal service. However, what is more probable is that the rings were invoked by the witness and notary, both of whom were clerics and defenders of canonical marriage, in order to construct a more acceptable account of the monarchs' behaviour by attributing to them a gesture linked to court culture, as analyzed by Stefano Cingolani in his study of the lawsuit.[50] Thus, in reality, there was no gifting of a ring. None of the women presented a ring as physical proof to verify their account, nor did they recount what happened to the rings after having bid farewell to the king. Furthermore, the mention of these rings should by no means be interpreted as referring to a symbol of a union between the kings and these women; both Muñina and Gerolda declared they never saw the monarchs again.

The Circulation of Rings Beyond Gender and Frontiers

Rings were both a form of wealth and emotional patrimony, and they went on to be circulated amongst relatives within a number of social contexts for generations, even travelling across the frontiers of the Iberian monarchies. They could also move beyond these kinship networks by being presented to ecclesiastical institutions, which as a rule were cathedrals and monasteries linked to the family in question. Through such donations the family maintained a degree of control over these items while also enriching the treasuries of the institutions they patronized.[51]

Rings that formed part of a personal or family treasury could be placed in circulation beyond the family for a number of motives.[52] On occasions they

50 Cingolani, "De la libertad," 55. This author argues that the narrative set out in this account and Gerolda's description corresponds to models of court literature.

51 Feller, "Formes et fonctions," 20; Rodriguez, "À propos des objets nécesaires," 63–89.

52 Feller, "Formes et fonctions," 12–14.

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were used as diplomatic gifts,[53] but they could also be presented to relatives as a sign of distinction and affection, or as a display of gratitude for services rendered. *Cantiga* 376 from the *Cantigas de Santa María* recounts how Alfonso X was in Seville with his brother Manuel whose service he greatly esteemed, and the king showed his brother a gold ring decorated with jasper which he was wearing, and he told him he would give it to him. When the Infante Manuel withdrew after the conversation, Alfonso ordered a man from his household to bring his brother the ring he had promised him. The man lost the ring along the way and beseeched the Virgin for help in finding it. The Holy Mary of the Port interceded, and the royal servant was able to deliver the ring to Manuel.[54] The *cantiga* highlights the ring's importance and underscores the king's affection for his brother and recognition of his services. Thanks to the Virgin Mary's intervention the ring also acquired a great apotropaic value and became almost sacred for its new owner.

Given the distances that could separate members of the royal family or noble kinship networks, rings would have been imbued with a significant material, emotional, and symbolic value for relatives. Rings crossing frontiers helped to reinforce family ties. A clear demonstration of this is provided by the wills drawn up by the Infante Pedro de Portugal and his sister Mafalda, the only children of Sancho I of Portugal and Dulce of Aragon, who were still alive in 1256. In Pedro's will, drawn up in Mallorca in October 1255, he bequeathed his sister Mafalda—*señora* (lady) of the Monastery of Arouca (Portugal)—all his rings and precious stones, and he ordered her

53 Following the marriage of Eleanor of England to Alfonso VIII of Castile in 1170, Henry II of England gave his son-in-law a ring with a yellow agate to reinforce their family and political ties. Jasperse, "With This Ring," 79–81.

54 "El en Sevilla morando, aveo que séu irmão/ Don Manüel con él éra que o amava de chão ... Porend' el Rey o amava, e gran dereito fazia/ E u estaban falando el Rei e ele un día, /un anél lle mostrou lógo el Rei, que sigo tragía,/ que dun jaspís mui riqu'éra, pédra nóbre connosçuda, / e disse que lla daría. E pos foi en sa pausada / Don Manüel, el Rei lógo non quis mais fazer tardada,/ mais enviou-ll' a sortella, en ouro engastõada, per un hóme da sa casa e diz: 'Muito me saúda / Don Manüel e dá-ll' este anél que ll'hei prometudo.'" ("While he was dwelling in Seville, it chanced that his brother, don Manuel, who loved him dearly, was there with him ... Therefore, the king loved him, and he did right in this. One day while the king and his brother were talking, the king showed him a ring he was wearing, which was of very rich jasper, a most noble stone, and he said he would give it to him. Then don Manuel went to his lodgings, and the king did not want to delay any longer but sent him the ring, set in gold, by a man of his household and said: 'Extend my fond regards to don Manuel and give him this ring which I have promised him.'"). *Songs of Holy Mary of Alfonso X*, 457–58. See also www.cantigasdesantamaria.com/csm/376.

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to donate them to God for the redemption of his soul and also to pay off his outstanding debts.[55] Shortly afterwards, in her will, drawn up between January and May 1256, Mafalda bequeathed to her brother one sapphire ring and a large emerald ring, in addition to other objects with an apotropaic value which were deemed capable of protecting against illness.[56] Mafalda died on May 1 and Pedro June 10, 1256. Because their deaths occurred so soon after one another, it is not clear whether the *manumissores* carried out Mafalda's will, nor whether Pedro received the items his sister had bequeathed to him. Nonetheless, their wills clearly reveal the siblings' concern that the rings they owned should remain in their families.

The example of Mafalda and Pedro's wills reveals how, despite the frontiers that separated these testators, these small valuable objects circulated between members of the same family, both men and women, as well as lay individuals and those who had chosen a career in the church or had taken holy orders. There are numerous cases of rings circulating between lay and ecclesiastical kinsmen, such as the signet ring that had belonged to Count Bernat Tallaferro de Besalú and which, at his death, was inherited by his brother Abbot Oliba.[57] Likewise, Sancho Peres Froião, Bishop of Porto, owned ruby and emerald rings that had belonged to his father, Pedro Homen. And in 1298 he bequeathed rings to his brother, the troubadour Esteban Peres Froião.[58]

The lack of detail encountered in charters seems to suggest that rings circulated within the family milieu without any clear distinction of gender. Admittedly, some rings seem to have been exchanged within female spheres, but many others passed between both the men and women in a family. For example, in 1211 Sancho I of Portugal presented all his rings to his daughter, Infanta Sancha, except the two he had inherited from his father King Afonso Henriques, which were left to his heir Afonso II.[59] María Pérez, a woman

55 Calderón Medina, "El testamento," 275: "Item legamus regine domne Mafalde, dilectissime sorori nostre, omnis anulos et lapides nostros, excepto anulo quem dimitimus Maioricense episcopo predicto; sic quod ipsa accipiat et retineat de illis quos uoluerit, et alios det amore Dei pro anima mea vel in debitis nostris."

56 Cruz Coelho, *Arouca: Uma terra*, doc. 16: "Item infanti domno Petro, fratri meo, meum momum et lapidem sapirum et aliam sortellam magnam Zmagardam."

57 Graells i Fabregat, *Dactyliothecae cataloniae*, 114–17. The signet ring was made in the Carolingian era. It reused a carved Roman stone and around its edge an inscription read: BERNARDUS COMES.

58 Morujão, *Testamenta Ecclesiae*, doc. 7.9.

59 Azevedo, *Documentos D. Sancho I*, doc. 194: "Et mando ut post mortem meam

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from the lower tier of the Galician nobility, owned some rings that had been bequeathed to her by her brother Juan Giraldi, and following her death she donated them to the Franciscans of Ourense for the purpose of making a chalice.[60]

Clearly, women played a key role in circulating these types of objects. Some rings belonging to noblewomen circulated within strictly female spheres, such as the "anulos de auro cum eorum iemas et gegoncis" (gold rings with gems and adornments) that Arsenda d'Àger bequeathed to her daughter in her will in 1068;[61] the gold ring that Gontrodo Cidi left to her daughter Mayor Rodríguez in 1143;[62] and the rings that María Pérez left to her daughter in 1252.[63] Through their successive marriages, these women were able to establish a number of ties with a series of family groups, which linked them to a diverse milieu in which jewels belonging to the family members of their different husbands, could be circulated. These women received, displayed, and passed on a variety of rings, ranging from the ring presented to them for their betrothal or else their wedding, to those they acquired for themselves or were gifted to them, as well as the rings they inherited from their own family.

Women not only displayed their rings in public, but some widows who took religious orders and went on to become abbesses of monasteries linked to their families, kept and continued to wear the rings they had owned prior to entering the monastery. In 1226, Urraca Gómez de Traba was serving as abbess of the monastery of San Pedro of Dozón, and in her will, drawn up that same year, she donated her smallest emerald ring to the male Monastery of Santa María of Osera. She had previously deposited four gold rings with the latter monastery, and her will also stipulated that these were to be used to pay her debts after her death.[64]

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habeat totam mea liteiram et meos anulos et sortilias, exceptis duobus anulis quos mando dari filio meo regni domno Alfonso."

60 Vaquero Díaz and Pérez Rodríguez, *Colección documental del Archivo de la Catedral de Ourense*, doc. 379. "Et anulos aureos qui fuerunt fratris mei domni Iohannis Giraldi ad opus unius calicis."

61 Chesé Lapeña, *Col.lecció diplomàtica de Sant Pere d'Àger*, doc. 87.

62 Fernández Catón, *Colección documental de la Catedral de León*, vol. 5, doc. 1438.

63 Vaquero Díaz and Pérez Rodríguez, *Colección documental del Archivo de la Catedral de Ourense*, doc. 379: "Mando filie mee tauoas meas et sortelias."

64 Urraca Gómez was the daughter of Count Gómez González de Traba and great-granddaughter of Count Fernando Pérez de Traba. She had married García Arias, before she served as abbess of San Pedro de Gozón from 1205, which was linked to

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The Leonese noblewomen Teresa Morán, the daughter of Morán Pérez and Elvira Arias, took her jewel collection with her when she entered the female Monastery of Santa María of Carrizo.[65] Teresa belonged to a mid-ranking noble family that had accumulated considerable wealth while serving the Castilian monarchy during the major Andalusian conquests.[66] The family's wealth probably explains her lavish and exotic jewel collection, which most notably included eight highly valuable rings adorned with diamonds and turquoise, which, at that time, were rarely to be found in the possession of the middle-ranking nobility. Over the course of her life, Teresa Morán had two relationships, first with a man called Fernando, with whom she had her daughter Mayor Fernández. She later married the *milite* Nuño Pérez de Tiedra in accordance with the canonical rite; he was the son of Pedro Fernández de Tiedra,[67] who took part in the conquests of Jaén, Cordoba, Seville, and Niebla. Four children were born to the latter marriage: Juan, Fernando, Elvira and Mayor Núñez. Following the death of her second husband, Teresa entered the Monastery of Santa María of Carrizo.

It seems that Teresa no longer resided in Carrizo when she drew up her will in 1269, yet she continued to keep jewels and other valuable items there.[68] She began her will by distributing her property,[69] and when it came to giving away her rings she identified three clearly distinct groups: the items she had acquired or inherited from her relatives, and those she had received respectively from her two husbands.[70] The latter two groups of

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the Monastery of Santa María of Osera. Fernández de Viana and Vieites, *Colección diplomática do Mosteiro de San Pedro de Vilanova de Dozón*, doc. 45: "Et de IIII[or] anulis, qui sunt in Ursaria, solvant debita mea que inferius scripta sunt ... Item mando predicto monasterio Ursarie minorum anulum meum smaragdinum."

65 The monastery was founded by her relative Estefanía Ramírez in 1176. Her aunt Teresa Ováriz served as abbess between 1203 and 1245. Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, docs. 69–217. Her niece María González later served as abbess between 1286 and 1305, see Costa, "Los Morán: Un linaje nobiliario en León (s. XIII)," 52.

66 Costa, "Los Morán: Un linaje nobiliario en León (s. XII)," 65–142; Costa, "Los Morán: Un linaje nobiliario en León (s. XIII)," 11–63.

67 Reglero de la Fuente, *Señorío de los montes Torozos*, 127; Costa, "Un linaje nobiliario en León (s. XII)," 107.

68 Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, doc. 428: "E tengo en Carrizo VIII. sortillas douro" (And I have in Carrizo eight gold rings).

69 Costa, "Los Morán: Un linaje nobiliario en León (s. XII)," 107.

70 Her mother made no reference to any objects in the will she drew up in 1252. Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, doc. 285

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items corresponded to the family networks for luxury items amongst her husbands' respective relatives, and they were thus left to their children.

Firstly, Teresa bequeathed to her daughter, Mayor Fernández, the chattels that her first husband Fernando, had left her and the largest *aljófar* (pearl) ring.[71] She left more luxurious rings to the sons who were born to Nuño. She bequeathed her most valuable rings to her son Juan, and these had belonged to the paternal side of the family: one ring with a large diamond and another gold ring that Nuño had given her, in addition to a gold ring with an emerald that had belonged to a certain Pedro de Tiedra, her husband's grandfather. Juan Núñez was the family's third successive male heir to own these rings, which had become imbued with the family's identity and also provided a way of commemorating the family's ancestors.

In her will, Teresa then proceeded to distribute the rings that formed part of her personal estate. Her daughter Mayor Fernández, who had been left a smaller inheritance by her father than her half-brothers, was compensated with three of her mother's rings: one that possibly had a moveable bezel, another that was adorned with a sapphire, and a third one set with a small turquoise. She left her son, Juan Núñez, another ring with a small turquoise. The three other rings, which she did not describe, were to be divided among Fernando, Elvira, and Mayor Núñez.[72] Each of her sons and daughters received at least one ring that had belonged to their mother, although Juan also obtained the rings that had belonged to his father's side of the family.

71 Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, doc. 428: "E mando aquella sortella de aliofar mays ancha ... a mia filla Mayor Fernandez" (And I stipulate that the larger *aliofar* ring [be given] ... to my daughter Mayor Fernandez.) An *aljófar* is an irregular or baroque pearl.

72 Casado Lobato, *Colección diplomática del monasterio de Carrizo*, doc. 428: "A Iohan Nunez el mio diaman grande e outra sortella douro, que me dio don Nuno, e outra sortella esmeralla grossa de ouro, que fu de don Pedro. Mando a domna Mayor Fernandez, mia filla, duas sortellas, ella una que se corre, e la utra que dizen zaphyra e un diaman pequeno. A Iohan Nunez outra sortella torquesa pequena. A Mayor Fernandez outra sortella torquesa pequenna e elas otras que hy ficaren partanas per Fernan Nunez e per Eluira Nunez, e per Mayor Nunez." (To Iohan Nunez my larger diamond [ring] and another gold ring which don Nuno gave me, and another large gold ring with an emerald, which belonged to don Pedro. I order that *domna* Mayor Fernandez, my daughter, be given two rings, the one [whose bezel] moves, and the other that they say has a sapphire and a small diamond. To Iohan Nunez another ring [with] a small turquoise. To Mayor Fernandez another small turquoise ring, and the others that remain are to be shared amongst Fernan Nunez and Eluira Nunez, and Mayor Nunez).

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Wearing One's Chattels

The intrinsic value of the precious materials used to make rings and other jewels created a reserve of wealth that the nobility exploited by selling and pawning rings to obtain an almost immediate liquidity that enabled them to confront any economic needs that arose, in addition to writing off any debts that were incurred.[73]

The Flaínez were one of the leading families of the kingdom of León, and for generations they used the rings that formed part of their family treasury as a guarantee for raising loans to meet their financial needs and resolve any lack of liquidity. In 1112, on one occasion of financial need, Count Fruela Díaz and Estefanía Sánchez handed over a ring to the Countess Teresa of Portugal to formally acknowledge and consolidate (*in roboratio*) her donation of a plot of land in Astorga.[74]

The family's wills also reveal how they used rings to settle outstanding debts at the time of their death.[75] In 1234, Countess Sancha Fernández—wife of Count Fruela Ramírez, great-grandson of Fruela Díaz y Estefanía[76]—drew up her will naming her sons, Ramiro Froilaz (II) and Rodrigo Froilaz, as her *manumissores*. Her last wishes indicate that Sancha owned an especially important ring that had probably been given to her by her husband, Fruela. The ring in question had been placed on deposit or in the custody of her grandson Sancho Ramírez, the abbot of the Monastery of Villaverde de Sandoval.[77] Sancha ordered her sons, Ramiro and Rodrigo

73 In 1290, the Byzantine princess, Eulogia Láscaris, had to pawn her jewels to two men in Valencia due to her lack of financial resources. It seems she had difficulties recovering them, as two years later, Jaime II of Aragon intervened to prevent them from being sold, and he helped ensure they were returned to their owner. Duran Duelt, "Sobre la demanda," 280–81.

74 Fernández Flórez and Herrero de la Fuente, *Colección documental del monasterio de Otero de las Dueñas*, doc. 324: "Ad roborandum kartula … a domina infans Taresia, unum anulum aureum." (*Ad roborandum kartula* … to her ladyship Count Taresia, one gold ring).

75 Men also used their rings to ensure their debts were settled following their death. In his will, drawn up in 1241, Nuno Sanç, Count of Roselló, instructed the bishop of Elna and Guillem de Torrella that after his death, they were to sell his silver drinking vessels, rings, and precious stones, amongst other properties, to pay off his debts and settle any offences he had committed. See Breton and Vinyas, "Le testament de Nunó Sanç."

76 Martínez Sopena, "Prolis Flainiz," 69–102.

77 The monastery of Sandoval had been founded by Ponce de Minerva and Estefanía Ramírez, the aunt of Ramiro Froilaz (II), in 1167. Sancho was the son of Ramiro

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Froilaz, to sell the ring in order to obtain sufficient money to carry out all the bequests of her will. It seems that disposing of the ring was considered to be a last resort, as the countess instructed that if there was sufficient money to cover the stipulations of her will with her other property, then ring was to be left to her firstborn son Ramiro Froilaz (II), who was to conserve it in the family treasury.[78] Some years later in 1277, her daughter-in-law, the Portuguese lady-in-waiting Châmoa Gomes de Tougues, widow of Rodrigo Froilaz, drew up her own will.[79] She named the archbishop of Braga as her *manumissor*, because much of the property she had inherited from her parents was located in his diocese. She bequeathed her rings, and ordered the archbishop to choose the two best ones for the Cathedral of Braga and sell the rest in order to carry out the instructions of her will and pay off her debts; she did not indicate the number nor origin of the remaining rings.[80] The rings must have been highly valuable given the scale of her outstanding debts, as she used all her rings for this purpose, except for the rings set with "gems of virtue" that had belonged to her father.

Thomas of Canterbury's Ring and Rings Set with Gems of Virtue

Kings and noblemen also possessed rings that had belonged to renowned bishops or saints, which rendered them almost sacred objects. These rings were highly esteemed and deemed to possess an incalculable value for their qualities, and they were ascribed healing and apotropaic

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Froilaz (II), who was the monastery's abbot between 1230 and 1236. Herrero Jiménez, *Colección documental del monasterio de Villaverde de Sandoval*, 64, 65, 69, 70, 72.

78 Martínez Martínez, *Cartulario de Santa María de Carracedo*, doc. 369: "Mando ut compleantur omnia per censum meum mobilem, et substantia meam; et si non abundaverint vendatur annulus meus quae tenet Abbas Saltusnovalis et compleantur. Quod si per censum, et substantiam mobilem omnia completa fuerint, annulus ipse detur domino Ramiro, filio meo."

79 Sottomayor Pizarro, "Pela morte," 219–33; Calderón Medina, "Rodrigo Froilaz," 131–52.

80 Sottomayor Pizarro, "Pela morte," 226: "Mando todas las otras sortelas ao arcebispo de Bragaa don Martim Giraldiz, que fille ende as duas melores e as otras venda pera comprar nas mandas e mas devidas." (I order that all the rings [be given] to the archbishop of Braga, don Martim Giraldiz, [and] that he choose the two best ones and sell the others to purchase [what is needed to fulfil] my instructions and [to pay my] other debts).

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properties,[81] which seems to have been excluded from mundane transactions.[82]

When the Infante Pedro of Portugal, lord of the kingdom of Mallorca, died aged sixty-nine, he owned a gold ring adorned with a sapphire that had belonged to Thomas Becket, and which was claimed to have the capacity to heal those who suffered from paralysis.[83] It was possibly the most valuable object he owned and the one that was ascribed the most potent curative powers, but it is not clear how he used it. The ring may have formed part of a ritual involving it being placed upon an individual's paralysed limbs while a priest offered prayers to bring about the sought-after healing. A similar practice was seemingly used around this time in the Gallican Monastery of Celanova, which is discussed in more detail by Therese Martin in Chapter 7.[84] Alternatively, the infante's personal physician may have performed treatments with it, or else Pedro may have worn it as an adornment on a daily basis to ensure constant protection against illness.[85]

It is also unclear how Pedro came to own the ring, although it is possible that his sister, Infanta Mafalda, could have sent it to him along with other relics and objects with healing properties for paralysis.[86] The infante may also have acquired it at the Monastery of Santa Cruz in Coimbra, the

81 Labarta has analyzed the miraculous qualities attributed to rings that had belonged to bishops and saints and their cult. Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 263–69.

82 Feller, "Formes et fonctions," 15.

83 Thomas Becket was attributed a thaumaturgic power and deemed capable of curing skin diseases and paralysis. Sánchez García, "Tomás Becket y la península," 14. It is likely that the infante suffered from familial amyloid polyneuropathy, also called Corino de Andrade's disease, which would have hindered mobility in the legs.

84 A number of hagiographic sources provide details on this type of ritual, for example the miracles worked by St. Rudesindus for those who used the ring that had been taken from his finger during the translation of his relics in 1172. The ring was kept at the Monastery of Celanova (Galicia). Miracle 37, written between 1200 and 1260, recounts how a priest from Limia was taken to the monastery because the fingers of his hands were contorted and atrophied. The monks took him to the saint's tomb and placed St. Rudesindus's ring and other relics on his hand. Having said a prayer, they withdrew and left the cleric alone there. Shortly afterwards, they returned and found the sick man's fingers were all straight. *Ordoño de Celanova*, ed. Díaz y Díaz et al, 50–52, 215–18.

85 The *maestre* Vicente served as his physician until his death. Calderón Medina, "El testamento," 271.

86 Villanueva, *Viage literario*, 263. In 1256 Mafalda left him a mirror that had the power to heal paralysis. Coelho, *Arouca: Uma terra*, doc. 16.

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religious house where he had the relics of the Martyrs of Morocco translated to in 1220, and where there had been a cult of Thomas Becket from an early date.[87] Alternatively, he may have acquired the ring in the Monastery of San Isidoro in León, while the infante was serving in the household of Alfonso IX of León; a number of relics of the saint were venerated there.[88]

In his will, drawn up in 1256, Pedro left the ring to the bishop of Mallorca, and he ordered that a chapel be built in the Cathedral of Santa Maria in Palma, where he was to be buried.[89] After Pedro's death, no further trace of Thomas Becket's ring has been identified: there is no reference to it in the relics conserved in the cathedral, nor has any reference to a cult concerning the ring been traced to this cathedral.[90]

His sister Infanta Mafalda of Portugal, lady of Arouca, owned another type of ring, those referred to as rings *de virtud* (of virtue), which begin to appear in documents, above all Portuguese ones, from the second half of the thirteenth century onwards. In the medieval world, the gems that decorated rings were attributed virtues depending on the etymology of their names, colour, and brilliance. Through these virtues, which were delegated by God,[91] the precious stones were deemed to possess the capacity to perform a great range of actions,[92] such as provide eloquence, wisdom or protection to their wearer,[93]

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87 Duggan, "Aspects of Anglo-Portuguese Relations," 1–19.

88 Calderón Medina and Martins Ferreira, "Beyond the Border," 23–29. The Monastery of San Isidoro had conserved garments that had belonged to Thomas Becket along with some of his bones, since the times of St. Martin of León (d. 1203). Domínguez Sánchez, *Patrimonio cultural*, doc. 90; Sánchez Márguez, "Tomás Becket y la península," 15.

89 Calderón Medina, "El testamento," 276: "Et legamus dicto domino Raimundus Maioricensi episcopo … et anulum auri cum lapide safireo, qui fuit sancti Thomasii de Conturberio."

90 The Cathedral of Palma conserves a number of relics that belonged to the infante, but no reference has been traced to the ring of Thomas Becket. Calderón Medina, "El testamento."

91 Pasero Díaz-Guerra, "La razón de ser," 344–47.

92 Beinert, *Windows on a Medieval World*, 68. Albertus Magnus, in his *De mineralibus*, explains how through contact with the stone the wearer benefits from its virtues. Bengtsson Melin, "For Love, Healing and Protection," 261–63. Sapphires were attributed faculties that contributed to intelligence and protected the chastity of whoever wore it, in addition to curing fevers, ulcers, and poisoning.

93 Beinert, *Windows on a Medieval World*, 55–66. Some gems could exert an influence over natural phenomena or the animal world, Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 3.

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as well as cure numerous illnesses, by touching them or else through the intervention of physicians.[94]

These rings were small but extraordinary items because of their incalculable value, and thus were restricted to the elite. They were an element of social hierarchization, whereby a special effort was made to always keep them within the family, so they would circulate amongst the family's members to bestow their beneficial virtues and provide protection at times of sickness. However, on occasions their owners also donated them to ecclesiastical institutions they had close connections with, thereby ensuring that future generations of their descendants would have easy access to and control over rings set with "gems of virtue" and thereby better guarantee their good health. In such cases, strict conditions were set to ensure that the rings were not removed from the treasuries of the religious institutions they were donated to. In the will drawn up by Infanta Mafalda of Portugal in 1256, she instructed that her two rings and three sapphires were to be kept in the treasury of the Monastery of Arouca, which she had founded and where she resided until her death, and she stipulated that by no means were they to be removed, except for tending to the sick.[95]

Egas Fafes, a member of a family that had settled in lands owned by the Lanhoso family since the eleventh century, served as Archdeacon of Braga, Bishop of Coimbra (1248–1267) and Archbishop of Santiago de Compostela and his personal treasury included eight virtue rings.[96] Days before his death, in 1268, he left instructions in his will that his rings were to be divided into three groups, according to their powers, and they were to be left to a number of ecclesiastical institutions and members of his family.

The six rings that were considered to be both the most valuable and virtuous were given to the monasteries linked to his family. The first of these was a large ring set with a sapphire which Egas had received from Pelayo Correia.[97]

94 Pasero Díaz-Guerra, "La razón de ser," 347–52. *Fisicus* was the title used for those who practised medicine.

95 Cruz Coelho, *Arouca: Uma terra*, doc. 16

96 The Lanhoso family served in the Portuguese court from the time of Afonso Henriques, although in the second half of the thirteenth century their power declined. Following this decline, the family's policy was to control the principal ecclesiastical institutions such as the Cathedrals of Braga, Coimbra and Compostela, through Egas Fafes, and the Monastery of Refóios de Basto, through the latter's brother. Sottomayor Pizarro, *As linhagens*, 2:716.

97 This was possibly the brother-in-law of Paio Soares Correia, see Sottomayor Pizarro, *Linhagens medievais portuguesas*, 2:715.

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Egas, in turn, donated it to the Monastery of Refóios in Basto, whose abbot was his brother, Hermigio Fafes, so that it would always form part of the monastery's treasury and never be removed from it, because it was believed to have powerful properties as a virtue ring. The second ring, one of the best, was donated to the Monastery of Paços in Sousa, and another was given to the Monastery of Fontarcarda, which had been linked to Lanhoso's family since 1067.[98] The fourth ring was given to the Monastery of Rendulfe, and the fifth ring was left to the Monastery of Santo Tirso. All these donations were accompanied by an overarching stipulation that they would remain permanently in the treasuries of the aforementioned monasteries.[99] Egas left the sixth ring to his kinswoman Alda Martins, which was a gold ring set with a sapphire, on the condition that it could be neither sold, nor donated, neither by her nor her husband, and that it would always remain in the possession of their legitimate heirs, ensuring that it would be preserved in the family sphere.[100]

The second group of rings were those that Egas Fafes donated to the Cathedral of Coimbra, the diocese of which he was bishop, and where he had given instructions he was to be buried. The first ring in this group was set with a large sapphire, which was attributed potent curative properties, and it was accompanied by another ring, that was also deemed wondrously potent for controlling haemorrhages. He stipulated that both rings must form part of the cathedral's treasury and that they were not to be disposed of, and that they had to be used by the chapter to cure the poor and sick; he declared that he had witnessed many people being healed with them through divine intervention.[101] He did not describe how the rings were

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98 Sottomayor Pizarro, *Linhagens medievais portuguesas*, 2:715.

99 Morujão, *Testamenta Ecclesiae*, doc. 2.28.

100 "Item legamus anulum nostrum de zeneraudo magno quem nobis dedit domnus Pelagius Corrigia monasterio de Refoyos quod sit ibi semper in thesauro et nunquam inde alienetur cum credamus ipsum quam plurimum virtuosum. Item anulum de zaphiro que est incastonatus oncabis (?) in auro legamus Alde Martini tali videlicet condicione quod ipsam non possit vendere nec donare nec maritus suus similiter sed semper remaneat uni de legitimis suis successoribus. Item legamus unum alium anulum de melioribus monasterio de Palaciolo et alium monasterio de Fonte Arcato et alium monasterio de Randufy et alium monasterio Sancti Tirsy sub condicionibus de aliis ante dictis et itaquod se[m]per remaneant in tesauris monasteriorum predictorum. Omnes enim ipsos credimus esse magni precii et quam plurimum virtuosos." Morujão, *Testamenta Ecclesiae*, doc. 2.28.

101 "Item anulum nostrum magnum de zafiro qui est valde virtuosus cum alio anulo qui vali mirabiliter ad sanginem restringendum dimittimus ecclesie Colimbriensi

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used, but it is possible that the cathedral chapter would offer prayers at the same time as the rings were laid upon the sick, as might have occurred at Celanova. However, it is more likely that he was referring to the practice of medicine at the cathedral itself; its canons included a number of physicians, including the bishop's personal *físico*, Maestre Durão.[102]

There is no documentary evidence for healing rituals involving the use of rings in Arouca, nor in any of the monasteries to which Egas donated his rings. Nevertheless, what seems most likely is that virtue rings were used in infirmaries by an *infirmarius*, or a physician to heal the sick.[103] By donating virtue rings their owners, besides doing a good deed and enriching a monastery's treasury, increased their prestige by converting monastic houses into places of healing. Successive generations of relatives in poor health made recourse to them to be cared for and healed, but it seems that other unwell people could also gain access to them. Only in certain cases, such as that of the Infanta Mafalda, was permission granted for gems of virtue to leave a monastery for the purpose of healing patients elsewhere. It is possible that she granted permission for them to leave Arouca so they could be used in the *domus infirmorum* of the Monastery of Santa Cruz of Coimbra, which was closely linked to the Portuguese monarchy, and where it is likely that medicine was both practised and taught.[104]

Besides the curative properties of these rings, royal families, the ecclesiastical hierarchy and noble magnates also acquired virtue rings for the moral virtues ascribed to those who wore them, as well as the political sig-

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itaquod sint semper in tesauro ipsius ecclesie et nullo modo alienentur nec aliquis habeat potestatem apropriandi sibi nec alienandi ipsos sed dentur per aliquam personam ab ipso capitulo deputatam pauperibus et aliis infirmitates pacientibus cum sufficienti et idonea captione. Multos enim per eosdem anulos a multis et variis langoribus operante Domino vidimus liberatos." Morujão, *Testamenta Ecclesiae*, doc. 2.28. Although Morujão does not indicate as such, it is possible that this ring was set with red coral, which was ascribed the power of stopping haemorrhages. Gilchrist, *Sacred Heritage*, 113.

102 Silva, *Físicos e cirurgiões*, 119. This canon of the cathedral served as physician to Egas Fafes until at least 1265.

103 Silva, *Físicos e cirurgiões*, 50–58. There are records for the *domus infirmorum* having existed in the Monasteries of Santo Tirso and Paços de Sousa, and likewise in Santa Cruz de Coimbra, from the second half of the twelfth century onwards.

104 The library of the Monastery of Santa Cruz had an extensive collection of books on medicine, and it has been argued that it could have been a centre for the practice and teaching of medicine in the second half of the thirteenth century. Silva, *Físicos e cirurgiões*, 84, 112.

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nificance they bestowed when worn in public.[105] Gomes Soares de Tougues, magnate under Sancho I of Portugal, owned two virtue rings, one decorated with a ruby, whose brilliance and colour were considered to be the true light of Christ, and another ring decorated with an emerald that represented the true faith of Christians in the face of the infidel.[106] It is possible that Gomes used them to present himself as a faithful servant of the Christian faith during this period of Christian advances into Islamic territory.

At Gomes's death, circa 1217, his rings were inherited by his daughter Châmoa Gomes de Tougues, who possibly wore them throughout her life and used their healing properties, until she died an heirless widow in 1279. In her will she also used virtue rings to save her soul and that of her mother, by donating them *pro remedio anima* to the Dominican Order in Oporto, where they were probably used to cure the poor and sick.[107]

Conclusion

In this chapter, the range of ways in which the Iberian nobility used their rings has been analyzed in conjunction with a consideration of their significance and the ways in which these valuable objects were circulated amongst relatives. Rings provided a valuable legacy that could be easily exploited to revive a family's depleted coffers as well as settle outstanding debts following a relative's death, yet they also embodied a symbolic and emotional legacy for the family. They were exchanged as a means of publicly declaring family alliances, as well as symbolizing the theoretical indissolubility of matrimonial ties during the period when matrimony was becoming established in line with the model created by the Fourth Lateran Council. Rings could also be offered by monarchs as a gift or payment to women they had extramarital relationships with. However, it seems more likely that clerics cited the existence of rings in lawsuits undertaken to legitimize kings' ille-

105 Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, 47–55. She has analyzed the political significance of the gems of virtue (rubies, sapphires and emeralds) set in the crown of Sancho IV of Castile (1284–1295). No documentary testimonies have been found for rings of this kind amongst other social groups.

106 He died around 1217. Sottomayor Pizarro, "Pela morte," 220; Calderón Medina, *Rodrigo Froilaz*, 136–37. Thirteenth century Castilian lapidaries began to include moralizing virtues for each stone. Pasero Díaz-Guerra, "La razón de ser," 343–46; Martínez Márquez, "La moralización," 177–86.

107 Sottomayor Pizarro, "Pela morte," 226: "As mias sortellas de vertude aos frades predigadores do Porto por ma alma e de ma madre" ([I leave] my rings of virtue to the Dominican friars of Porto for my soul and that of my mother).

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gitimate sons, in order to project a more discerning image of this aspect of royal behaviour.

Due to their economic, symbolic, and emotional value rings were circulated amongst inner family circles, and were exchanged between consanguineous and affinal kinsmen and kinswomen, and members of both the laity and clergy across both generations and frontiers. Over the course of successive marriages, women had access to a range of networks for circulating the rings they wore during their lives and redistributed at their death amongst their descendants, thereby keeping them within their paternal family networks. Many of these women, such as Teresa Morán, kept and used their rings in monasteries linked to their family, while others, such as Urraca Gómez and Countess Sancha Fernández, deposited them in monasteries for safekeeping, possibly along with their chattels, personal treasury, and documents.

There was an extraordinary class of rings that had a special use and significance for the medieval elites: those that had either belonged to saints or were set with gems of virtue. In addition to the display of moral virtues, they were used to guarantee good health and cure illnesses. Rings of this type were exclusive and exceptional objects that were owned by the nobility and donated to monasteries linked to their families, on the condition that these rings always remained in their treasuries. Thus, they would be available to cure their kinsmen and kinswomen for centuries to come in the monasteries' infirmaries, which also converted the monasteries into prestigious centres for healing that became linked to the family's memory.

Although the rings that adorned the hands of kings, queens, noblemen, and noblewomen over the course of the Iberian central Middle Ages seem barely visible in documentary sources, a detailed analysis has revealed their significant presence and use amongst the nobility. As the Christian forces gained new territory from Islam and obtained greater wealth, men and women acquired and accumulated rings in their personal treasuries. Their increasing number of rings was matched by a greater use of precious materials such as gold and diamonds, which when flaunted in public demonstrated their economic and social power. But no less important was the use of these small objects to heal physical maladies, ensure their souls' salvation, and, finally, to construct an enduring image of the owners of these rings that would be commemorated by future generations.

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Chapter 4

A SIGN OF WOMEN'S POWER

SIGNET RINGS IN MEDIEVAL RUS

CHRISTIAN RAFFENSPERGER

STUDY OF THE medieval history of Western Europe—what we typically label "medieval Europe"—moved away from the male-dominated master narrative decades ago, and studies of elite women and their power have multiplied, as have studies moving down the social hierarchy as far as can be determined.[1] Medieval art history has done the same, in a wider swath of Europe, discussing the important role that women played as makers of medieval art from textiles to manuscripts and from buildings to infrastructure.[2] In the Slavic world, an important part of medieval Europe, but not of "medieval Europe" as it is generally understood, scholarship on women has failed to receive the same push to prominence as it has elsewhere.[3] And yet, when investigating women in the eastern half of Europe, and the medieval kingdom of Rus in particular, we see that they, too, had power.[4] They could own land and property, could rule (within limits), and held social, cultural,

1 In no particular order, see Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin*; Pick, *Her Father's Daughter*; Jasperse, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power*; Garver, "Sensory Experiences of Low-Status Female Textile Workers," 50–76.

2 Covering women as agents in the creation of material culture, see Martin, ed., *Reassessing the Roles of Women as "Makers."* Similarly, see the collection Chapman Hamilton and Proctor-Tiffany, eds, *Moving Women, Moving Objects*.

3 This is the case despite an early engagement with the issue by Eve Levin. Levin, "The Role and Status of Women in Medieval Novgorod." See also Pushkareva, "Women in the Medieval Russian Family," 29–43. The scholarship on women in Rus has picked up in the second decade of the twenty-first century with my own work as well as that of Ines García de la Puente and Talia Zajac in particular.

4 Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*.

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Figure 4.1. Ring, Kyiv, twelfth century. Silver and niello, h. 1.68 × w. 2.17 × d. 1.92 cm. London, British Museum, inv. no. 1907,0520.18. © The Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

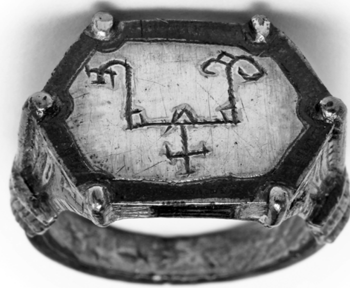

Figure 4.2. Ring, Kyiv, twelfth century. Silver and niello, h. 1.38 × w. 2.20 × d. 2.1 cm. London, British Museum, inv. no. 1907,0520.17. © The Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

religious, and economic authority within elite society. The current article examines another aspect of women's power: signet rings. Though the rings are extant as objects of material culture, their relationship to the power of women in medieval Rus has been little studied and is poorly integrated into wider work.[5] However, as will be made clear, women's signet rings in Rus were markers of their power and demonstrate their influential positions as members of the ruling clan.

The most comprehensive work done on Rusian rings, in general, is by T. I. Makarova.[6] Her focus was on nielloed rings in particular (and did not include a discussion of power or gender), though her study contains twelve rings which bear the clan symbol, or some variation of it, of the ruling family of Rus, typically known as the Riurikids. This name has been contested as part of a wider discussion of Muscovite claims to the medieval past, and in my work I typically use Volodimerovichi (children of Volodimer) to indicate the ruling clan.[7] Ljudmila Pekarska has updated Makarova's list to include

5 Erin Jordan has an excellent discussion of the differentiation between authority and power, and why power matters so much for understanding medieval women. Jordan, *Women, Power, and Religious Patronage*, 22–23. See also Erler and Kowaleski, "Introduction," in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, ed. Erler and Kowalski; and Krause, *Beyond Women and Power*.

6 Makarova, *Chernevoe Delo Drevnei Rusi*, 39–48.

7 For the argument and rationale see Raffensperger and Ostrowski, *The Ruling Families of Rus*, 39–41.

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another dozen rings from Kyiv, made of both gold and silver.[8] Pekarska's particular focus is on rings from a hoard found in 1906 "just opposite the gates of St. Michael Golden Dome Monastery" in Kyiv, and on two of the eight total rings found within that collection.[9] The two rings in question showcase Volodimerovichi clan emblems and are seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

The rings were made of silver and utilized a combination of construction techniques to make each of the various parts. Those parts were then soldered together using a powdered solder of unknown type held on by glue and heated to bind the pieces together.[10] This method of construction was much more time- and money-intensive than simple casting, and thus it is suggested by Pekarska that this means the rings were custom designed and built for an elite customer.[11] The diameter of the two rings is quite small, more suggestive of a woman's finger than a man's; especially when we compare it with a known man's ring from this period of Rus which is substantially larger.[12] Thus, it has been suggested that these were women's rings. The bezels of the rings are shaped differently, one circular and one hexagonal. But despite the difference in shape, both rings are held on by a series of claws, four in one case and six in the other. For both rings though, the back of the bezel in each case is reinforced by "a thin silver lap" to provide comfort to the wearer, but also to provide additional strength for the bezel. This is one sign that these rings were used as signet rings. The bezel itself is surrounded by a niello design, however, the niello does not extend to the symbol in the centre. This causes Pekarska to suggest "that these rings had a double purpose—both ornamental, and functional to impress wax seals."[13] The final indicator that these are signet rings is that the design is carved in reverse, so that when the ring is used, it appears in its proper orientation—leading to the conclusion that "[s]uch rings were probably used to seal documents and letters."[14] While the rings

8 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 83.

9 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 19, 81–92. The rings can be found in the British Museum's online collection at www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1907-0520-17 and www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/ H_1907-0520-18.

10 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 85.

11 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 85, 91.

12 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 91–92. Additionally, the entire hoard of which these rings were a part was of women's jewellery. For a discussion of ring size and gender, see the Jitske Japerse's opening chapter to this volume.

13 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 90.

14 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 90. Proper orientation of symbols such as

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may have had this practical purpose, it is also impossible to discount the very real possibility that simply owning, wearing, and displaying a ring bearing the clan emblem would be a mark of status. These two rings are fascinating objects about which we would love to relate an intricate history, however there are at least two problems when we attempt such an investigation. The first is that the symbol displayed on the rings is akin to, but not the same as, the typical symbol of the Volodimerovichi. The second is whether or not Rusian women even used seals, given their absence from much of the material record. Each of these problems will be taken in turn in an attempt to better understand the context for these rings in Rus.

The first problem relates to the clan emblem, often called a *tamga* or symbol, which is displayed prominently on the rings, and was the symbol of the wearer embossed into wax (most likely) to signal their approval, permission, or at least intent.[15] Half a century ago, V. L. Ianin created a comprehensive catalogue of all the extant seals from Rus which forms the basis for modern discussions about seals.[16] Within that group are a number of seals which depict the Volodimerovichi symbol. For the symbol of the ruling clan, Ianin created a typology which suggests that from a relatively simple base of two parallel lines connected at the bottom, with a small additional line dropping down from the connecting piece—something akin to a tuning fork—there proceeds an evolution over time into the increasingly complex "trident" models which are seen in later symbols (Figure 4.3).[17] Ianin's typology has recently been updated and developed by A. V. Mikhailov and S. V. Beletskii, with a special focus on those symbols from the tenth and eleventh centuries found in southern Pskov.[18] Their collection of twenty-five symbols contains three of the bident type and thirteen of the trident type. One of the bidents and seven of the tridents contain crosses. This collection adds to

these may be difficult to discern and Pekarska's conclusion, which I accept, is based on a comparison with the extant seals.

15 *Tamga* is the word typically used in Russian scholarship for this symbol. *Tamga* is a Turkic word, used later during the Mongol period of Rus for the symbol of a ruler or even a simple maker's mark. For the period under discussion, it works as a term, but is "othering" in that it creates a unification with a later period, based in Central Asia, that was not in use in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

16 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, ed. Ianin.

17 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, ed. Ianin, 1:38–41, with a table illustrating the change over time suggested by Ianin on 40 as related to coins.

18 Mikhailov and Beletskii, "Geraldicheskaia podveska s territorii iuzhnoi pskovkhschiny," 321–26.

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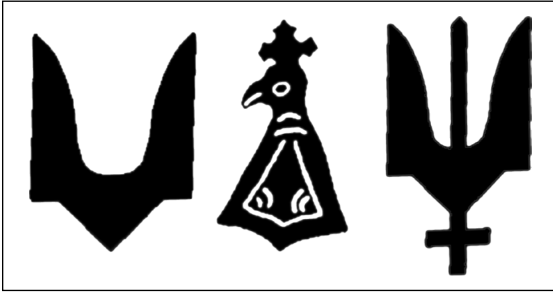

Figure 4.3. Symbol of the ruling clan of Rus. Adapted from A. V. Mikhailov and S. V. Beletskii, "Geraldicheskaia podveska s territorii iuzhnoi pskovkhschiny," in *V kamne i v bronze: Sbornik statei v chest' Anny Peskovoi*, ed. A. E. Musin and O. A. Shcheglova (St. Petersburg: RAN, 2017), 321–26, here figs. 3 and 4 on pp. 323–24. Adapted by Sarah Tagg.

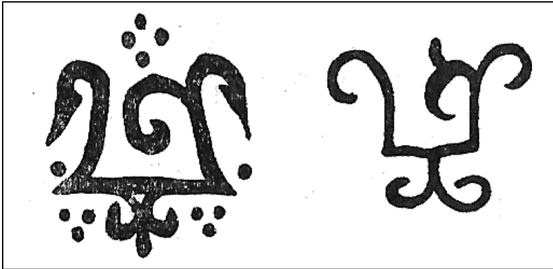

Figure 4.4. Volodimerovichi symbols. Adapted from *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV vv*, vol. 1, *Pechati X-nachala XIII v*, edited by V. L. Ianin (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), nos. 291, 292.

our understanding of the symbols which "signified property belonging to kin, and formed the basis for various kinds of personal and family heraldic emblems."[19]

However, the symbols on the rings in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 only loosely fit the typologies depicted in Figure 4.3. Both feature bident symbols with dependent crosses. Only one of the three bidents from Mikhailov and Beletskii contains a dependent cross, and five of the thirteen tridents.[20] This makes the dependent crosses on the rings rare/unique, but in addition, the bidents themselves are not the standard two lines, connected at the bottom by a horizontal. Instead, in both of these symbols, we see additional decorative items. Studying Ianin's collection of images of seals, one can see the typology. However, it is a rough guide, for it does not cover the variability of the symbols used. The lack of variability could most likely be explained by Ianin's focus on wider clan symbols and symbols of male rulers. Figure 4.4 displays two additional symbols of which there are five and ten examples respectively.

Figure 4.4 (left) does not have the defined dependent cross we see in the rings (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2), though a cross can be visualized. Other pos-

19 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 82.

20 Mikhailov and Beletskii, "Geraldicheskaia podveska s territorii iuzhnoi pskovkhschiny," 322.

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sible comparands include a fleur-de-lis or an early symbol of the Volodimerovichi which looks like a bird swooping to attack.[21] Figure 4.4 (right) adds to the impression that the designer wanted something dependent, but here we see a foliate design. The symbols in Figure 4.4 also correspond to the foliate motif extending off the upright element on the right side of the rings in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. The left upright depicted on the first ring (see Figure 4.1) is capped, and there is no additional design. The bident appears off centre, but when considering the extended floral motif, the entire width of the symbol is centred within the circle of the bezel. Though the foliate motif also appears upright on the ring presented in Figure 4.2 it is less elaborate, without the curlicues descending. The left upright bends to the outside, akin to what we see in slightly different forms in the two symbols present in Figure 4.4. Additionally, the left upright in Figure 4.2 ends with what appears to be a sun symbol.[22] There are several extant eleventh-century coins from Rus which have a cross at the end of the left upright, but no explicit sun symbols.[23] There are further additions inside of the bident, which Pekarska suggests are a series of three triangles. However, while the middle one, capping the dependent cross does appear to be a triangle, the two at the junction of the uprights and the base seem to be English right-angle markers, more than triangles. The end result of our comparison points out the similarities to existing seals, though we do not have a precise match from amongst them.

A related question would be: where did the designers of these seals find the style or motif they chose to incorporate into the base Volodimerovichi symbol? The rings discussed above were found in Kyiv and date to the early twelfth century. One of the most well-known sites of Kyiv in this period was the church of Holy Sophia. Originally erected in the middle of the eleventh century by the ruling couple Iaroslav and Ingigerd, the church has continued as a sanctuary in the city until the present day. The church is decorated with a variety of frescoes, though it can be difficult to differentiate between what was original and what was part of the Ukrainian Baroque remaking of the church much later.[24] In the borders of some of the mosaics,

21 For images of the bird as a symbol and further discussion, see Kovalev, "Grand Princess Olga of Rus' Shows the Bird," 460–517.

22 This identification is Pekarska's, challenging an earlier suggestion that this was a cross. *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 61, 85. A different type of sun symbol, eight-armed rather than four, appears on another Kyivan ring of the period. *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, pl. 5.4c.

23 Spasskii, *Russkaia monetnaia sistema*, 46.

24 Pevny, "The Encrypted Narrative of Reconstructed Cossack Baroque Forms,"

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which feature saints and archangels, and do date to the medieval period, one can see similar foliate motifs to those that appear on the rings featuring the same series of dual three-quarter loops extending off of a tendril.[25] Perhaps a more immediate comparison could be made to a very interesting feature of some of the frescoes of the archangels displayed in the cupola, also original as we understand it. Dating to the middle of the eleventh century, these images are fairly traditional showing a genderless though femininized figure with wings on their back and wearing a loros. In the archangel's right hand is a sceptre, often surmounted by a cross, while their left hand cups an orb with a cross emblazoned on it.[26] The cross is in the patriarchal style, though four of the five archangels pictured have additions at the bottom of the cross. One seems simply to be set on a pedestal, something one can see on medieval Roman coinage from this period.[27] However, the other three all display elements similar to the foliate motifs on the rings mentioned above s. In one instance, the bottom of the cross splits into two, with each side gently curving upward to form a half circle.[28] A second utilizes the same base design, though here the lines of the half circles proceed to the top bar of the patriarchal cross. The half circles also have foliate designs extending off of the inside of the half circle, towards the cross, on each side.[29]

The final example (Figure 4.5) is more elaborate, for it still has the split at the bottom and each side is curving up but in a figurative "s" design.[30] Both sides seem to have a foliate motif soon after the split, and both sides have something on the terminus of the line. The right side appears to have a vegetal ending while the left side appears to have the same sun symbol seen in Figure 4.2. One of the persistent questions in dealing with makers of medieval art is their agency and the origin of their inspiration.[31] If we are

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471–520; Boeck, "Believing is Seeing," 167–80.

25 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 55.

26 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 96–100.

27 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 100. For the coins, see the copper folis of Alexios Komnenos in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, www.doaks.org/resources/coins/catalogue/BZC.2009.032/view.

28 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 97.

29 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 99.

30 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 96.

31 Therese Martin has dealt with this in detail in her collection *Reassessing the Roles of Women as "Makers" of Medieval Art and Architecture*, and one of her suggestions is that women who inspire and / or pay for the object are makers as well. Martin, "Exceptions and Assumptions."

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Figure 4.5. Archangel from the Holy Sophia Church cupola.
Reprinted from V. N. Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski XI–XV vv*.
(Moscow: Isskustvo, 1973), fig. 96. Public domain.

searching for sources of inspiration for designs, we could do much worse than a location, the Holy Sophia Church, where we know that the elite of Kyiv—the find spot of the rings— spent a good deal of time on a regular basis. The resemblance is evident, though we cannot make a direct connection between the two, thus it is also possible that there is a common source for both images which was used by makers in Rus. What does this mean for the construction of the rings? It is possible that, drawing on a common base of the bident form, the Rusian women who wore these rings added motifs to express their own design sensibility and create a symbol that would represent them to the wider world.[32]

32 This is not uncommon in the world of signet rings. In Byzantium almost all individuals of a certain status had their own, unique, signet ring. Hostetler, "Reading

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The second problem we mentioned is whether or not Rusian women used or would even need signet rings. Beginning with the textual history, it is important to note that little of it is contemporary to the eleventh and twelfth century. The first extant chronicle source is from the later fourteenth century, though it was compiled in the early twelfth.[33] This chronicle, known as the *Povest' vremennykh let* (PVL), named after its first line, situates Rus into biblical history beginning with the flood, but with regular entries only in the tenth century, increasing in the eleventh. Interpolated into the tenth century entries are two treaties between the Rusians and the medieval Roman Empire. The language and style of these treaties strongly suggest that they are actual documents, as the entries also make explicit.[34] The 944 treaty stipulates that the ruler of Kyiv must provide "gold seals" for his emissaries and silver ones for merchants.[35] In the same provision of the treaty, those seals are associated with charters that must be sent, suggesting where those seals would be applied. The 971 treaty makes it explicit that the ruler, Sviatoslav in this case, uses seals saying, "we have … sealed with our seals."[36] The PVL, the bulk of whose text covers the eleventh and very early twelfth century, does not reference seals or sealing again, and neither the PVL nor other medieval Rusian chronicles mention women's seals. Nor do any of the textual sources describe what symbol may be on the seal.

Many lead seals have, however, been preserved in Rus and have been excavated in the past two hundred years. One of those seals is a seal of Svyatoslav, the ruler referenced in the 971 treaty, confirming the validity of the textual source, at least in regard to the existence of seals and sealing.[37] In the corpus of seals, there are also numerous examples which have been identified with women. Talia Zajac has suggested that we can divide women's seals in Rus into three categories.[38] First, seals depicting a female saint,

and Displaying Monograms." Women also wore monogram rings in the Merovingian period, see Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers."

33 *The Povest' vremennykh let*, ed. Ostrowski, xvii–xviii. Three hundred Rusian manuscripts and books, mostly ecclesiastical, exist from the period before 1300, with twenty-three from the eleventh century and eighty-three from the twelfth century. Franklin, *Writing, Society and Culture in Early Rus'*, 23.

34 For a full analysis of the treaties see Wozniak, Jr., *The Nature of Byzantine Foreign*, 1973.

35 "The 944 Treaty," transl. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, 9.

36 "The 971 Treaty," transl. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, 13.

37 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, 1:166.

38 Zajac, "The Social-Political Roles of the Princess in Kyivan Rus'," 134.

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which may be associated with a queen. Second, an image of a saint and a "mysterious talismanic Cyrillic inscription" on the opposing side. And third, seals with an actual name and an inscription such as "Lord help thy servant." The third category is the easiest to deal with as we have some good examples of seals with women's names on them. For instance, there is a "[s]eal of Maria Momakhis, noble arkhontissa."[39] Maria is a common name, and we do know of several powerful Marias in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Rus. One Maria (d. 1179), the daughter of Mstislav Volodimerich and wife of Vsevolod Olgovich (both rulers of Kyiv), has a second seal well identified with her. It bears an image of a woman in medieval Roman-style dress, including a crown with pendilia labelled with the name Maria, as well as an inscription on the other side asking for protection for your servant Maria.[40] Arkhontissa is a Greek word that is used in medieval Roman sources for female Slavic rulers; such as in the *De ceremoniis* of Constantine VII when the famed "princess" Olga visits Constantinople in the mid-tenth century.[41] The name, or title, Momakhis, is much more problematic and multiple interpretations have been offered for what this may mean.[42] One of the most famous seals from Rus also bears a woman's name. This seal has a Greek inscription which says: "Lord, help thy servant Theophanu, arkhontissa of Rus, Muzalonissa."[43] The alternate side has an image of two female figures with halos gesturing toward a disc between them in which Christ appears. Ianin has investigated this seal extensively and suggests that Theophanu was a member of the medieval Roman Mouzalon clan and she married Oleg Sviatoslavich in the eleventh century.[44] As interesting a theory as this is, it seems unlikely given other evidence.[45]

Frustratingly for our search for context, none of these lead seals, however, were made by the extant signet rings. This may not be surprising given the preservation history of medieval Rusian objects. Pekarska has suggested that "[s]uch rings were probably used to seal documents and letters" and those

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39 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, 1:17–19.

40 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, 1:71, 259, no. 161. See also Dimnik, "The Princesses of Chernigov," 170–71.

41 *Constantine Porphyrogennetos*, bk. 2, ch. 15, 594–98. Olga is typically referred to as a "princess" in the literature, but I would call her a "queen."

42 For more discussion of this, and other, seals with female figures or owned by women and their relevance, see Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*, ch. 3.

43 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, 1:25, 251 no. 30.

44 Ianin, "Pechati Feofano Muzalon," 76–90.

45 Kazhdan, "Rus'–Byzantine Princely Marriages," 414–29.

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may have been discarded and lost over time.[46] The preservation of objects over time varies by location and by soil content. The particular conditions which make the preservation of birch bark documents possible in the north of Rus do not exist around Kyiv, for instance.[47] Lead and other metal seals would have been more durable as well. For the moment, the only conclusion we can reach is that women did have seals, and that they likely owned and/or wore seal rings. The latter is especially true given Iulia Stepanova's excavations of women's burials in the Volga region of Rus where she concluded that, "[f]inger rings appear in 37 percent (165) of all female burials with dress details."[48] The only things more common are temporal rings, which were hung from a headband or head covering of another type at or near the temples. Sadly, none of the rings in the excavated burials were signet rings.

The broader trend in medieval studies to include and integrate women, especially among elites, has not reached Rusian studies. Thus, though such an emphasis would be passé for Western Europe, it seems important to make clear that elite women in Rus did have power and thus would have needed a method of validating their transactions, such as the use of a signet ring. There is a good amount of evidence in the primary sources that women could own land and exercise legal powers. The law code from Rus, the Expanded Pravda, includes provisions for female land ownership and the ability to act under the law.[49] Treaty sources from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are clearer on elite female ownership of property. The "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich [1128–60]" lays out the required tributes to support the church and court in his lands.[50] The charter includes provision "6. And [I hereby order my lieutenants] to extract for the Holy Mother of God a tenth of the tribute [paid in whatever] regions are called Smolensk [lands], and to make no subtraction whatever, whether [the tribute be] great or small, prince's or princess's, or whoever else's [it

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46 *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 90. A similar problem exists with Byzantine signet rings of which metal seals are extant, but of which the wax seals typically impressed with images from rings, are not preserved. And see also Labarta on the Ummayad ruler of al-Andalus in this volume.

47 The corpus of these documents is online at http://gramoty.ru/birchbark/.

48 Stepanova, *The Burial Dress of the Rus'*, 56–57.

49 "The Russkaia Pravda," trans. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, arts. 90, 91, 93, 101, 102, 103, 106. For an analysis of them see Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*, ch. 4.

50 "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich," trans. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, 51–55.

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may be]."[51] Elite women and elite men are both included, explicitly. Since this document is not specifically about women in any way, there should be no reason to disbelieve the inclusion of this group. Similarly, both "The First Treaty of Novgorod with Tver' Grand Prince Iaroslav Iaroslavich [1230–71], ca. 1264–65," and the "Treaty of Novgorod with Tver' Grand Prince Mikhail Iaroslavich [1271–1318], 1304–5," contain similar provisions which state that: "Neither you, nor your princess, nor your boyars, nor your courtiers are to hold any villages throughout the Novgorod lands."[52] Finally, there even exists a graffito from the Holy Sophia Church in Kyiv which attests to female land ownership—"Vsevolod's princess … purchased Boian's land," which also includes information on purchase price.[53] We could expand this to look at the chronicle sources which also mention female land ownership and property ownership in general, in desultory detail indicative of regular attention i.e., not special and therefore not suspect.[54]

Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, who has studied western medieval seals extensively, notes that, "[t]he seal is a sign of and conveys specific representations of the sealer's identity within a juridical context, and it is this legal function that distinguishes it from virtually all other iconographic sources."[55] Similarly, in the medieval Roman Empire, the model of rulership *par excellence* in the Middle Ages, legal agreements typically required the validation of a signet ring, leading to their consumption and use by a broad spectrum of the populace, including women.[56] Both of which confirm our suggestion that women needed seals and potentially signet rings to manage their legal affairs, providing a context, even if not the full story, for these women's signet rings. Studying signet rings for Rus, especially in relation to wider medieval European (inclusive of the medieval Roman Empire/Byzantium) trends, helps scholars to develop an appreciation for the ways that material culture can help us expand and flesh out our relatively thin written source base related to women and power in the kingdom of Rus.

51 "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich," art. 6.

52 "The First Treaty of Novgorod with Tver' Grand Prince Iaroslav Iaroslavich," art. 12.

53 Pevny, "Dethroning the Prince," 75. For an extended look at this inscription see Drobyshcheva, "Graffito No. 25 iz Sofii Kievskoi," 130–45.

54 Women's property ownership in both legal and chronicle sources is covered in Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*, ch. 4.

55 Bedos-Rezak, "Medieval Women in French Sigillographic Sources," 1–2.

56 Vikan and Nesbitt, *Security in Byzantium*, 16.

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Chapter 5

THE SOCIAL USE OF RINGS AMONG THE MUSLIMS OF AL-ANDALUS

ANA LABARTA

Background to the Use of Rings in al-Andalus

The eight hundred years of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula (711–1609), first as the ruling class, later as dominated minority, cannot be studied and described as monolithic, since Islamic communities underwent profound social and political changes. This is true also with regard to the use of rings. To approach the social use of rings in al-Andalus we must start by knowing the rules and regulations regarding the use of rings that affected the whole Muslim community to which al-Andalus belonged and then rely on the medieval Arab sources specific to this area, both written and archaeological.

The term *ḥadīth* is used for Islamic tradition, being an account of what the Prophet said or did; it is considered second in authority to the Quran. According to tradition, when the Prophet Muhammad wanted to write to the Byzantines and other peoples to invite them to convert to Islam, someone warned him that they would not read his letter unless he put a seal on it. For that reason, in the year 628, he had a silver ring made with the inscription *Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*. This anecdote shows that the signet-ring—a ring to seal with—was not common in pre-Islamic Arabia and that its use was a foreign cultural import. Muhammad's ring served to keep his letters closed and their contents secret. Its imprint would be stamped (in positive and in relief) on a piece of clay in a similar way to that seen in some papyrus documents

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from the early Islamic period that still retain their seals.[1] After his death, the Prophet's ring remained in the possession of his successors until it fell into a well from the hands of 'Uthmān, and proved impossible to recover.

Muslims adopted the signet-ring following the example of the Prophet, with a clear preference for silver rings set with carnelian gems. The first rulers had rings with different personal mottoes and Arab sources mention the texts inscribed on every Orthodox, Umayyad, and 'Abbasid caliphal ring until 1225.[2]

The Tunisian historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) summarizes what was known about the use of the ring during the first centuries of Islam, which is not much, and always referred to practices in the Middle East; only at the end does he point out that in the Maghreb "the ring worn on the finger is considered as one of the insignia of royalty" and states that such a jewel "made of gold and set with a corundum [*yāqūt*], a turquoise [*fayrūzaj*] or an emerald [*zumurrud*], is worn by the sovereign as a hallmark of his dignity."[3]

His contemporary, the Moroccan chronicler Ibn Marzūq, corroborates this statement. In his biography of the Merinid ruler Abū-l-Ḥasan (r. 1331–1351) he relates that this ruler was wearing a gold ring "in the manner of kings [*mulūk*]," but that he changed it for a silver one after having consulted the sages who told him that gold was rejectable.[4] Such a luxurious Moroccan gold ring of the second half of the fourteenth century whose fashion sought to imitate foreign models, surely did not follow tradition; it had little to do with the one that, centuries earlier, bore a simple inscription and was used to seal diplomatic correspondence.

As every epoch and region had its local customs, we must refrain from applying to the Iberian Peninsula what is documented in 'Abbasid administration in Baghdad, and what European travellers of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries observed about cultural practices in Persia, Turkey, Egypt, or Morocco.[5] The search for data is not easy and the harvest is not plentiful; therefore, many of the questions we can ask ourselves will be left without a documented answer.

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1 Abbott, *The Ḳurrah Papyri*, 27–33.

2 They were assembled by Murr, *Drey Abhandlungen*, 89–91; Hammer-Purgstall, *Abhandlung über die Siegel*, 4–8. Also, from other sources, by al-Naqshabandī and al-Ḥurrī, *Al-Akhtām*, 61–71.

3 Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddima*, bk. 3, ch. 37 "The Ring."

4 Ibn Marzūq, *Musnad*, 130.

5 This is what is described in Allan and Sourdel, "Khātam, khātim."

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Figure 5.1. A ruler wearing a ring on the fifth finger of his left hand. Leire ivory casket (detail), 1004–1005. Photograph courtesy of Pamplona, Museo de Navarra.

Arabic poetry frequently cites jewels, particularly necklaces, but rings rarely are mentioned; an allusion in Ibn Quzmān (d. 1160) “if your ring falls into the well” indicates nothing other than that they existed and were sometimes lost.[6] Yet they are not named in notarial forms that list jewellery. The Andalusi works that collect proverbs, stereotyped comparisons and popular sayings rarely mention rings either; I found only two allusions in the compilation of the Cordovan al-Zajjālī (1220–1294); one looks like a joke: “What

6 *Todo Ben Quzmān*, 339.

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do you need, oh you naked [one]? He answered: a ring and a purse;" the other is somewhat obscure: "although the rings disappeared, the fingers remained."[7]

Arab historical sources provide little information about signet-rings, the sealing of documents, what was written on the seals or their use in the lands of al-Andalus; these topics are mentioned only tangentially. Nevertheless, one can find brief accounts scattered through the chronicles and annals of the caliphs, biographies of judges or sages, and literary prose works; once gathered, they give us some idea of what sources might refer to and represent the use of signet-rings (and to a lesser extent the ring in general) over time. To these written sources, we will add the material provided by archaeology and iconographic evidence (Figure 5.1).

The Umayyad Rulers of al-Andalus and Their Signet-Rings

None of the signet-rings of the Umayyad rulers of al-Andalus, whether worn officially or in private, nor their imprints have been preserved, simply because we do not have any original official documents of that period. Arabic sources merely record the texts that were inscribed on rings, with slight discrepancies.[8] It seems that initially the most common formula was *bi-llāh yathiq Fulān wa-bi-hi ya'taṣim* (In God so-and-so trusts and in Him he takes refuge). This is what was written on the rings of the oldest Andalusi rulers 'Abd al-Raḥmān I (r. 756–788), Hishām I (r. 788–796), al-Ḥakam I (r. 796–822), and it was also the inscription on the private ring of Muḥammad I (r. 852–886), though he had a different motto engraved on his official seal.

According to the eleventh-century historian Ibn Ḥayyān,

> prince 'Abd al-Raḥmān [II, r. 822–852] was the first who decided to inscribe the main and most renowned seal of the caliphs with the now famous motto 'So-and-so is satisfied with [God's] decree' … This motto has continued to be used by the descendants who succeeded him because it pleased them, they adopted it and continued to use it after him until his dynasty became extinct. Prince 'Abd al-Raḥmān dropped the ring [*khātim*] that he wore and with which he stamped the seal [*al-ṭābi'*] in the margins of the edicts of his kingdom. He was saddened by his loss, searched for it everywhere, sent missives ordering to look for it, but it could not be found. He then ordered a new inscription to be engraved on one of his other rings. He instructed his

7 Ould Mohamed Baba, *Estudio dialectológico*, nos. 91 and 128.

8 See in Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 89–91 all the texts with their variants and documental references.

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> intimate, the eunuch Naṣr, to ask the literati and sages who were in Court to think of a brief and appropriate expression to engrave on the ring stone. Naṣr called 'Abd Allāh Ibn al-Shamir, who was in the palace most of the time and was close to prince 'Abd al-Raḥmān, informed him of what the prince wanted and commissioned him to draft a new motto to achieve the reward. With his usual inventiveness, he soon composed the following verses: 'Effective seal of power that shows to people his good judgment / The servant of the Clement [*'ābid al-raḥmān*] is satisfied with God's decree.' Naṣr took the ring and the two verses to the prince and informed him of what had happened with Ibn al-Shamir. The prince was very pleased with the aphorism and he ordered to engrave on the ring: *'Abd al-Raḥmān bi-qaḍā' Allāh rāḍin* ['Abd al-Raḥmān is satisfied with God's decree]. It was thus fulfilled, and later on all those who succeeded him maintained this inscription and no one changed it.[9]

Indeed, as the Andalusi chronicles confirm, on the official signet-rings of all 'Abd al-Raḥmān II's successors the motto *bi-qaḍā' Allāh rāḍin* was engraved after each of their names. It is documented on those of Muḥammad I (r. 852–886), al-Mundhir (r. 886–888), 'Abd Allāh (r. 888–912), 'Abd al-Raḥmān III (r. 912–961), although it is said that he usually wore a ring with the inscription: *bi-llāh yantaṣir 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir* ('Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir wins with the help of God), al-Ḥakam II (r. 961–976) and Hishām II (r. 976–1000, 1010–1013). The inscription on the seal of Muḥammad II (r. 1009) is not known; that of Sulaymān al-Musta'īn bi-llāh (r. 1009, 1013–1016) showed only his name: Sulaymān Ibn al-Ḥakam.

The ring was one of the objects that were part of the ruler's visual display of power, for it symbolized the legitimacy of the authority of the one who wore it; that is why the action of giving it to somebody (*ramā bi-khātami-hi ilay-hi*)[10] was tantamount to naming him heir. This gifting is attested several times, for example in relation to the succession of 'Abd al-Raḥmān I in 788:

> It is said that 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mu'āwiya, seeing himself close to death while Hishām was in Mérida and Sulaymān was in Toledo, told another of his sons, 'Abd Allāh, called al-Balansī, who was next to him: 'Give the ring and the power to the one of your two brothers who comes first.'[11] Hishām was the first to arrive, and he camped in Ruṣāfa, where 'Abd Allāh met him. Following their father's last wishes, 'Abd Allāh surrendered the power to his brother by handing their father's ring to him.

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9 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fol. 143v, ch. *al-khātam*.

10 The verb *ramā* has sometimes been edited as *bariya* and *bara'a* from different manuscript sources.

11 Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān II*, 61–62, *fa-rmi ilay-hi bi-l-khātam wa-l-amr*.

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This same passing of rings happened when al-Ḥakam I (d. 822) decided to cede the power to his son ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II,[12] and when ʿAbd Allāh (d. 912) gave his ring to his grandson ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III "meaning that he was appointing him as his successor."[13]

So, whoever placed the seal on official documents was the one who held actual power. This explains the behaviour of the chancellor al-Manṣūr (Almanzor), *ḥājib* for the weak caliph Hishām II al-Mu'ayyad, who from the year 992 onwards decided to use his own seal instead of that of the caliph to show he was the effective ruler of al-Andalus. This is related by Ibn Abī Zarʿ, but the edition is missing two words at the end of the passage.[14] Fortunately the quote is complete in another source, taken from a better copy, saying "In that year al-Manṣūr ibn Abī ʿĀmir suppressed the seal of al-Mu'ayyad from the official writings and used only his own. From that time on, al-Mu'ayyad was called 'the *wāw* of ʿAmr.'"[15] To understand this degrading nickname, equivalent to 'be useless,' we must remember that in Arabic the names ʿAmr and ʿUmar would be written alike if it was not for a letter *wāw* added to the end of ʿAmr to distinguish it, a necessary but mute letter.

Ring Owners

In addition to the ruler, other people of high status such as ministers and court dignitaries, military positions, judges, and lawyers held signet-rings. The Andalusi historian Ibn al-Faraḍī says that Abū Zakariyā' Yaḥyā ibn Malik ibn ʿĀ'idh, from a well-known family of scholars living in Tortosa, told him that his grandfather ʿĀ'idh ibn Kaysān's ring was engraved with the words *ʿĀ'idh bi-llāh ʿā'idh* (ʿĀ'idh seeks refuge in God).[16] In this case, the text played with the owner's name, although the well-known Quranic expression of seeking refuge in God was seen on other rings as *bi-llāh yuʿīdh ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Aswad* (ʿAbd al-Wahhāb ibn Aswad seeks refuge in God).[17] According to Ibn Bassām, the famous Cordoban polymath Abū Muḥammad Ibn Ḥazm

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12 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fol. 139v, *wa-bariya ilay-hi bi-khātami-hi*.

13 Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān II*, 157, *ramā bi-khātami-hi ilay-hi*; *Una crónica anónima*, 29, *bara'a bi-khātami-hi ilay-hi*.

14 Ibn Abī Zarʿ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 116.

15 *Una descripción anónima*, 1:184; the final words are in n. 86 with a question mark.

16 Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta'rīkh ʿulamā'*, 1:277, biography 996.

17 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 223.

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(d. 1064), the author of *Ṭawq al-ḥamāma*, who was a minister at the time of al-Manṣūr, owned a ring with the engraving *yā ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad ittaqi Allāh tarshud* (Oh ʿAlī ibn Aḥmad, trust God and you will be on the right path).[18] These instances show that the signet-ring was a highly personal object, with the name of its owner linked to a pious expression.

How personal these items were, is evidenced by stories that tell us about people who, after being killed, had their hand or finger cut off in order to remove the ring to show it as proof of their death; a fact that reveals the unique and individual character of each ring. The head and hand of the corpse of Sulaymān (d. 928?)—son of the rebel Ibn Ḥafṣūn—were amputated, and his silver ring was presented to the minister as convincing proof of his death. There are two versions of the event that disagree on the names of the responsible party: "Ibn Muẓāhir had beaten him with the sword, and it was he who cut off his hand and commissioned the officer Muḥammad ibn Yūnus to remove the ring from his finger; he hastened to take it to the minister."[19] The second version attributes both actions to Saʿīd ibn Yaʿlā: "He cut off his head and cut off his finger with the ring, which was made of silver, a precious one."[20] Here, the use of silver is again confirmed as well as its preciousness, references that are missing in the first narration.

That the despoiling of rings was usual is confirmed by several other episodes.[21] When al-Nāya, who since 1066 was minister of the taifa king of Granada, *ḥājib* Bādīs al-Muẓaffar (r. 1038–1073), travelled to Guadix for an enquiry, he stayed in the house of the governor Wāṣil, a man he trusted completely, who entertained him, got him drunk and finally killed him, as part of a plan hatched to take power in Granada. After al-Nāya was assassinated, somebody was dispatched to Toledo to look for prince Māksan with al-Nāya's ring so that the prince would be sure of al-Nāya's death. The messenger told him: "There is no longer in Granada anyone who opposes you or confronts you."[22]

18 Ibn Bassām, *Dhakhīra*, 1/1:166.

19 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabas (V)*, 204–5, fol. 132.

20 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabas (V)*, 207, fol. 133.

21 Almanzor did not believe the announcement of the death of the prestigious general Ghālib during a military confrontation against him in July 981, until the hand with his ring and then his head were presented to him; see Ibn al-Khaṭīb, *Aʿmāl al-aʿlām*, 74. About the killing and taking the ring from the finger of Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad Ibn ʿAbbād, brother of the Sevilla taifa king al-Muʿtaḍid in 1039 by the Ṣinḥāja, see Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān III*, 202.

22 ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Bulughghīn, *Kitāb al-tibyān*, 65, fol. 27a–b.

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In all these narrations, rings served as identifiers because of their inscriptions; yet nothing is said about their appearance, probably because they belonged to the same plain model.

Beware of Where You Wear It

The major schools of Islamic jurisprudence argued without agreement on whether or not Muhammad habitually wore his ring, and on which hand and on which finger he would have worn it.[23] These questions affected what the faithful should do, and this depended on the school followed in each area. According to the Hanafi, Hanbali, and Maliki schools (the last one was the prevailing one in al-Andalus and North Africa) the ring must be worn on the left hand, while according to the school of al-Shāfiʿī, it must be worn on the right hand.

In this respect, we have a unique story with exceptionally interesting implications. Its central character was Aḥmad ibn Yūsuf ibn ʿĀbis (d. 910),[24] from Huesca, who travelled to Tunisia to attend the teachings of the prestigious Maliki faqīh Yaḥyā b. ʿUmar (d. 902).[25] One day, Yaḥyā observed that Aḥmad was wearing his ring on his right hand. He took the sacred book away from his hand, pushed him away and spoke an ugly word to him. When one of those who witnessed the incident asked Aḥmad for the reason why Yaḥyā did this to him, what did he reproach him for, Aḥmad showed his ring, on which it was written 'There is no deity but God. Muhammad is the messenger of God' and said: 'I swear by this *shahāda* that my beliefs were never the ones the sheikh suspected of me. What happened was that, when I went to the restroom, I changed the ring from my left hand to my right one, to avoid wearing it while washing after urinating. I then forgot to put it back in place on the left hand.' When Aḥmad's explanation arrived to Yaḥyā, he regretted having treated him harshly, he then treated him kindly, pardoned him, and so all was well again.

To understand this anecdote, we need to remember that the left hand is considered impure and is used for cleaning oneself, and also to bear in mind that Yaḥya b. ʿUmar, in addition to being a Maliki *faqīh* himself, had written a refutation against al-Shāfiʿī. The seemingly slight slip-up on the part

23 The references to the specific *ḥadīths* can be found in Allan and Sourdel, "Khātam, khātim," 1103.

24 Khushanī, *Akhbār*, 21–22, biography 19.

25 See his biography by Chalmeta, "Ibn ʿUmar al-Kinānī, Yaḥyā."

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of the disciple in wearing his ring on his right hand was enough to make his teacher suspect that he was an adept of the Shāfiʿī school.

The Uses of the Signet-Ring

The imprint of the signet-ring has been and still is used for different functions in various societies throughout history: to prevent the contents of vessels from being stolen or altered, to avoid uncontrolled access to the interior of a building, to validate documents and to close letters.[26] In absence of sealed documents we return once more to chronicles to see which of these functions are attested in al-Andalus.

The seal of validation or subscription ensured the validity and veracity of what the text affirmed in a written document, it replaced the signature and was used by the highest echelons of society as an expression of power and status, and also as a means of identity. The seal was applied on an open public document and remained attached on it. It could be pendent to a parchment or affixed to a paper one. Several references attest to this use of signet rings, showing that in these cases the seal (*ṭābiʿ*) was the imprint of the ring (*khātam*).

When on one occasion prince al-Ḥakam I (r. 796–822) was obliged to testify in a trial, he called two *faqīh*s of his court, wrote the attestation on a piece of paper in his own handwriting, sealed it with his ring (*bi-khātami-hi*) and gave it to them saying: "This is my attestation, with my handwriting and under my seal (*taḥta ṭābiʿ-ī*). Give it to the judge."[27] The ring that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II (822–847) lost was the one "he used to stamp the seal (*al-ṭābiʿ*) in the margins of the edicts of his kingdom."[28] And, as already stated, Almanzor decided to seal the official documents with his own signet instead of that of the caliph, thus demonstrating his own authority.

The chronicler Ibn ʿIdhārī reports that at the beginning of the Fitna, in the year 1008, a certain Ibn al-Qāriḥ was sent by the powerful minister ʿĪsā ibn Saʿīd to meet with the eunuch Naẓīf and convey to him a secret message concerning a plot to overthrow ʿAbd al-Malik al-Muẓaffar, the son of Almanzor. He had with him a letter of credentials authorizing him to speak on behalf of ʿĪsā, with the imprint of his ring on it.[29] Unfortunately, there

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26 For seals in a global context, see Menéndez Pidal, *Los sellos en nuestra historia*.

27 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fol. 124r; Nubāhī, *Marqaba*, 74.

28 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fol. 143v.

29 Ibn ʿIdhārī, *Bayān III*, 32.

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is no physical record of any official document authenticated with a ring, as there are no records predating the Nasrid era, and by then seal matrices were used.[30]

Normally, private letters were sealed so that their contents would remain secret, not altered, and read only by the recipient. The Zanāta chief al-Khayr ibn Muḥammad ibn Khazar, a faithful ally of ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III, regularly wrote to him to tell ʿAbd al-Raḥmān what was happening in Oran and the Algerian coast.[31] The chronicle narrates that in 940 the caliph made this Zanāta chief an excellent and valuable gift, which included various luxurious garments, precious objects, distinguished military harnesses, and one of his private rings, which was set with an emerald of great value, a magnificent jewel, with his name engraved in it; he ordered him to seal (*al-ṭabʿ*) with it only the missives which he so often addressed to him.[32] We have here a singular example which not only shows one of the uses of the seal ring, but also the importance of gift giving in medieval society. To the luxury objects he usually offered to his allies, the caliph added on this occasion a very special item: one of his own rings, to reaffirm and show the close connection he had established with this North African leader.

Summons stamps were loose imprints of the judge's ring that were sent to the defendants while their summons to trial were transmitted orally; the imprint credited its bearer and validated the message. Some consider it a Germanic custom imported to Iberia by the Visigoths, although others believe it derives from the Roman *tesserae*. Summons stamps' use among the Christian population is attested in the *Fuero Juzgo* and in legal texts of the eleventh and twelfth centuries which regulate its use.[33] Did the Muslims of al-Andalus use the citation seal as well? In the book about the biographies of early Andalusi judges by al-Khushanī we read that:

> when Muḥammad ibn Bashīr was appointed judge, he printed ten stamps. When a plaintiff asked him for a stamp, he would give him one and order his secretary to enter the name and address of the defendant in the register, and also the name of the person to whom he gave it, to which he said: 'Beware

30 Labarta, "Sellos en la documentación nazarí."

31 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabas (V)*, 259–60, fols. 171 and 172 with the text of two of his letters.

32 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabas (V)*, 460, fol. 312. Despite the praising opinion of the chronicler, I suspect it was probably a prasiolite or an aventurine.

33 Menéndez Pidal, *Los sellos en nuestra historia*, 113–22.

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> to use it unfairly' and he made him promise to return it. These seals always came back to his hands and he was able to use them until he died.[34]

The story goes together with several anecdotes that highlight the unconventional attitudes and the eccentricities of this judge,[35] who was frequently mocked; the fact is narrated as something exceptional, although the rarity lies perhaps in the fact that only ten imprints lasted so long.

We are told, too, about the severe behaviour of some of the judges, as was the case of al-Faraj ibn Kināna, a judge from late 813 to July 816, who gave his summons stamps (*ṭawābiʿa-hu*) to anyone, without exceptions.[36] The *fatā* Badrūn told prince Muḥammad I about the judge Sulaymān ibn al-Aswad:[37]

> 'I treated with disdain a woman who sued me for a house I owned and as soon as I did it, she came to me with the judge's summons stamp.' He excused himself from going, claiming that he had important occupations, but the judge sent somebody who brought him before him and rebuked him: 'You disobeyed me and did not take my seal.'[38]

From the examples given above, it appears that Muslim judges of al-Andalus used summons stamps at least during the ninth century, but the surviving references do not allow us to answer the question whether they continued to be used in the following centuries and whether they were the imprints of their rings, as I suspect, or those of another type of matrix.

Visual Sources

Archaeology confirms and complements what we know through written sources, adding to it a touch of materiality and preventing our imagination from leading us down wrong paths. At the same time, as we will see below, the rings themselves and their inscriptions open new unsuspected doors onto their meaning in society.

The Leire or Pamplona ivory Casket kept at the Museum of Navarre (Pamplona), a Cordoban work dated 1004, shows a man sitting on a cushion, wearing a ring on his left little finger. Jorge de Navascués noted the ring and assumed that the man was Hishām II, stating that "the true caliphal insignia

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34 Khushanī, *Quḍāt*, 77; Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fols. 121v–122r. Muḥammad ibn Bashīr was appointed judge by al-Ḥakam I (796–822).

35 Khushanī, *Quḍāt*, 80; Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fol. 122v.

36 Ibn Ḥayyān, *Muqtabis II*, fol. 125r.

37 He was appointed judge by Muḥammad I (852–886).

38 Nubāhī, *Marqaba*, 85.

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Figure 5.2a. Silver ring, eleventh century. Córdoba, Museo PRASA Torrecampo, no. 7676. Photograph courtesy of Juan Bautista Carpio.

Figure 5.2b. Silver ring with engraved carnelian cabochon, eleventh century. Córdoba, Museo PRASA Torrecampo, no. 7675. Photograph courtesy of Juan Bautista Carpio.

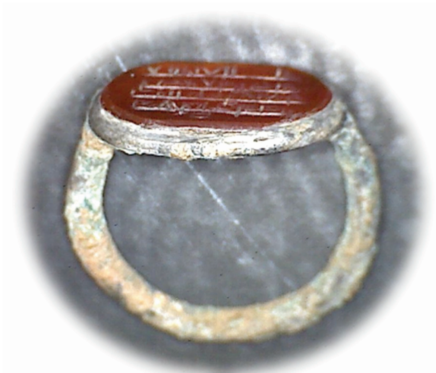

Figure 5.2c. Silver ring with engraved carnelian, eleventh century. Found in Córdoba PP07-M9-T130. Córdoba, Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba. Photograph courtesy of Agustín López.

Figure 5.2d. Gilded silver ring with glass cabochon, ca. 1140. Found in Albalat (Cáceres). Cáceres, Museo de Cáceres. Photograph courtesy of José Miguel González Bornay.

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or emblem was the royal seal consisting of a gold ring on which a phrase was engraved as a motto."[39] He was right in his appreciation of the symbolic character of the ring, but Islam dislikes men using gold and, accordingly, the caliph's ring was most probably made of silver. It is a specimen with a heavy wire shank and quite a high bezel, and it seems to be set with a stone. Among the motifs embroidered with silk on a piece of linen kept at Oña (Burgos), one is a sitting man who has been interpreted as a caliph.[40] Initially, a ring was perceived on his left little finger. However, the textile was then in poor condition with part of its threads loose or lost. After it has been cleaned and restored, the ring can no longer be seen, and consequently it has become clear that it was a misappraisal due to the threads being out of place.

Most of the rings that have come down to us via excavations and finds are made of silver and are almost always formed by a wire shank in the form of an incomplete circle soldered to the base of a setting (Figures 5.2a–d). There is a chronological evolution: in the earliest stage, rings have their inscription engraved in negative, in the metal of the solid bezel; later, they have the engraved inscription on a carnelian ring stone. Following the fall of the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba in 1009, the rings are mostly set with glass cabochons, and they no longer have an inscription. It seems as if, by then, the ring had lost its signatory function in favour of the metal seal matrix, as the chronology of the few bronze seal matrices that have been found correspond to the taifa epoch and later.[41]

The texts on the preserved rings have the name of the owner combined with "trusts in God" or an equivalent expression (Figures 5.3a–b). They are inspired by the formula seen on the rings of the eighth century Andalusi rulers, although the full expression is present only in an engraved carnelian of a later date: *ʿAqīl bn Atā bi-llāh yathiq wa-bi-hi yaʿtaṣim* (ʿAqīl ibn Atā trusts in God and takes refuge in Him).[42] The most common wordings are: *bi-llāh Fulān yathiq*;[43]

39 Navascués, "Una joya," 244 and lám. XII; about Makariou and Robinson identifying him as ʿAbd al-Malik see Rosser-Owen, *Articulating the Ḥijāba*, 282–88, in particular 285n26.

40 For image, discussion, and references see Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 36–37; Rosser-Owen, *Articulating the Ḥijāba*, 78–79, 302–6; Labarta, "Los epígrafes," 99, 121.

41 Labarta, "Matrices de sello"; Labarta, "Nuevas matrices."

42 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 225.

43 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no.14 *Muḥammad ibn Yazīd*; no. 89 *ʿAbd Allāh ibn Isḥāq*; no. 22 *Muḥarrir* or *Muḥriz*; no. 232 *Talīd ibn ʿAbd al-Akram*.

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Figure 5.3a. Imprint kept at Granada, Biblioteca de la Universidad de Granada MS-2-041(2-10). The original seal ring (tenth century) is now lost but was found in Martos (Jaén). Text: *Bi-llāh Talīd b. ʿAbd al-Akram yathiq*. Drawing by author.

Figure 5.3b. Imprint kept at Madrid, Real Academia de la Historia, CASE/9/7970/4(3). The original seal ring (tenth to eleventh century), now lost, was found in Écija (Sevilla). Text: *Tājīt b. ʿUmar bi-qaḍā' Allāh rāḍin*. Drawing by author.

Figure 5.3c. Silver ring with carnelian seal showing complete *shahada* (profession of faith), eleventh century. Écija, Museo Histórico Municipal de Écija. Photograph courtesy of Antonio Fernández Ugalde (reversed).

Figure 5.3d. Carnelian seal showing complete *shahada*, eleventh century. Córdoba PP07-M9-T132 face A. Córdoba, Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba. Photograph courtesy of Agustín López (reversed).

Figure 5.3e. Carnelian seal expressing the unicity of God, eleventh century. Córdoba PP07-M9-T132 face B. Córdoba, Museo Arqueológico de Córdoba. Photograph courtesy of Agustín López (reversed).

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Fulān bi-llāh yathiq;[44] *bi-llāh yathiq Fulān*;[45] and *thiqat Fulān bi-llāh* (So-and-so trusts in God).[46] The new motto adopted by ʻAbd al-Raḥmān II is seen on a ring found in a tomb in Écija, of which only two imprints made in 1787 survive: *Tājīt ibn ʻUmar bi-qaḍā' Allāh rāḍin* (Tājīt ibn ʻUmar is satisfied with God's decree).[47] Other expressions are documented in unque items. There are very few rings with proper names only.[48]

Rings Forging Religious Connections

All the mottoes engraved in the signet-rings from al-Andalus had a religious flavour and showed the faith and confidence their owners held in God. It is not unusual for Arabic ring carvings to offer their text in the negative even when they show religious phrases without an owner's name and, consequently, with no value as personal seals. I am referring to those with the Islamic profession of faith or Quranic quotations. To these, we must add those rings with the same texts but in positive, as these too were testimony to their owner's piety. We know, for example, that the Almohad caliph Abū Yūsuf Yaʻqūb al-Manṣūr (r. 1184–1199) had his ring engraved with *ʻalā Allāh tawakkaltu* (In God I have delegated).[49] His successor, Muḥammad al-Nāṣir (r. 1199–1213), wore a ring with the phrase *ʻalā Allāh tawakkaltu wa-huwa ḥasbī wa-niʻma al-wakīl* (In God I have delegated. He suffices me, and what an excellent delegate He is).[50] Their names did not appear on the bezel, and I wonder if they used them to seal or only to show their piety.

Among the medieval rings found in al-Andalus, some present the complete profession of faith in negative, others in positive; such phrases may be engraved directly into the silver bezel of the ring, or in a carnelian intaglio set into a silver ring.[51] Some of these examples have been found during

44 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 8 *ʻAbd al-ʻAzīz ibn Mu'min*; no. 20 *Qāsim*, 24 *Saʻīd*.

45 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 54 *Saʻīd*.

46 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 2 *ʻAbdūn*; no. 5 *ʻAbd al-ʻAlī*; no. 6 *Isḥāq*; no. 10 *Yaḥyā*; no. 12 *ʻAfrā'*; no. 17 *ʻĪsā*.

47 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 65; Labarta, "Banqueri y la impronta," 93–94 and nn. 63–64.

48 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 7 *Ghawth ibn ʻAṭā' ibn Ghānim*; no. 56 *Sharīk ibn Ḥayyūn*; no. 215 *Ḥakam ibn Muḥammad*.

49 Ibn Abī Zarʻ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 216.

50 Ibn Abī Zarʻ, *Rawḍ al-qirṭās*, 231.

51 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 13, 18, 32, 137, 218; and nos. 29, 219–22.

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archaeological excavations in burials, both of women and men, still placed on the deceased's fingers or near the corpses (Figure 5.3c).[52] We also have rings with the complete profession of faith associated with a name, such as: *Sukayna tashhad an lā ilāha illā Allāh Muḥammad rasūl Allāh* (Sukayna testifies that there is no deity but God; Muhammad is God's envoy) and *'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Mūsā yashhad an lā ilāha illā Allāh wa-anna Muḥammad rasūl Allāh*; or only with its first part: *Shunayf yashhad al-lā ilāha illā Allāh*.[53] We may assume they were mostly meant to show the piety of those who wore them, perhaps already in life.

Of great interest are five carnelian stones found in Cordoba in tombs of the caliphal period, with identical pious texts, engraved both on the obverse and reverse despite being set in a ring, which totally precludes the use of the hidden face as a seal (Figure 5.3d–e).[54] They are not reused gems, as the style of the engraving is the same on both sides, done by the same artisan. It is also surprising that three of them have been found in the tomb of the same woman;[55] if she had been buried with the jewels she usually wore, a little more variety would have been expected. On the obverse of all five rings we read the first part of the profession of faith, which proclaims the oneness of God combined with verses that complete it: "There is no deity but God. He is the only one [Q XL,84 and LX,4]. He has no associate [Q VI,163]. His is the power, His is the praise. He is powerful above all things [Q LXIV,1]." Among pious Muslims it is believed that one's sins may be forgiven if, after fulfilling the compulsory ritual prayer, one repeats 33 times "Glorified be God," 33 times "Praise be to God," and 33 times "God is the greatest" and then recites the aforesaid combination of Quranic texts.[56] On the reverse of those same gems, we see the complete profession of faith "I bear witness that there is no deity but God and that Muhammad is God's envoy." [57]

One clear conclusion drawn from the texts inscribed on these stones is that the deceased who wore them were Muslims. While this seems obvious, it is puzzling to notice that among the 1,750 rings, seals, and gems engraved

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52 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 15, 28–32, 129, 216, 218, 219–22.

53 See Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 15, 216, and 214.

54 Labarta et al., "Anillos y cornalinas"; Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 29, 219–22.

55 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 220–22.

56 Quasem, *Salvation*, 111–12.

57 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 219–22. In no. 29, this cannot be verified as the stone is still set on the ring.

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in Arabic kept in the Cabinet des Médailles of the National Library of Paris, the Zucker and the Khalili Collections, and the British Museum, and with most originating from different Islamic lands, only half a dozen ones from the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century make explicit reference to Muhammad.[58] In an Arabic-speaking society, to affirm the oneness of God in Arabic does not imply being a Muslim, as Jewish and Christian minorities agree with them on that point; it is the second part of the Islamic profession, the one that attests to the prophetic mission of Muhammad, which clearly confirms that the owner of the ring was a Muslim.[59]

The archaeological record does not tell us whether the deceased in whose graves the rings and stones have been found already wore them during their lifetime or if their relatives added them at the time of the burial. Because of their religious inscriptions, these rings seem suitable to accompany the dead in their transit to the afterlife, and to bear witness to the Muslim faith of their wearers before the Angels of Death, much like a small version of an epitaph that they possibly lacked over their tombs. One wonders why in these few cases it was considered so important to highlight the Islamic creed of the deceased as to include a tiny testimony of faith in their graves against the normal practice of not putting any object in tombs. A possible answer is that their piety was in doubt, perhaps because they were recent converts.

Coin-Rings and Political Connections

An easy and quick way to construct a religious ring was to take a silver coin and solder it to an open hoop, with the ends flattened and bent inwards, placing it so that the visible face is that with the profession of faith (Figure 5.4a–b). The silver coins minted by the Almohad Caliphate (1121–1269) had a characteristic square shape; several examples are preserved in which one such dirham was used as a bezel. In the 2006 archaeological excavations of the Camí La Bola in Xàtiva (Valencia), one such ring was found which reads *Lā ilāha illā / Allāh Muḥammad / rasūl Allāh* (There is no deity but God. Muhammad is God's envoy). Another one was found during the 2007 campaign, still placed on the finger of the skeleton of an elderly woman (Figure 5.5); on the top face we read *Allāh rabbu-nā / Muḥammad rasūlu-nā / al-Mahdī imāmu-nā* (God is our Lord, Muhammad is our envoy;

58 For rings in these collections, see Kalus, *Catalogue des cachets*; Content, *Islamic Rings and Gems*; Wenzel, *Ornament and Amulet*; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals.*

59 Labarta et al., "Anillos y cornalinas," 275; Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 70.

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Figure 5.4a. Silver ring made with a square Almohad coin, twelfth–thirteenth century. Found in Manises. Valencia, Museo de Manises. Photograph by author.

Figure 5.4b. Silver ring made with an Ibn Hūd coin, 1228–1237. Madrid, Instituto Valencia de Don Juan. Photograph courtesy of Margarita Pérez Grande.

Figure 5.5. Silver ring made with an Almohad dirham still placed on the finger of the skeleton. Camí la Bola archaeological excavation, Xàtiva, Valencia. Photograph courtesy of Juan Salazar.

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the Mahdi is our guide).[60] This last coin adds to the profession of faith a reference to Ibn Tūmart, the spiritual and first military leader of the Almohad puritanical reform movement who was recognized (1121) by his followers as the Mahdi, the expected divinely guided justicer.

After being defeated at the battle of Las Navas de Tolosa (1212), the Almohads lost much of the territories of al-Andalus, but continued to rule in Africa until 1269. In 1228, Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf ibn Hūd started a rebellion in al-Andalus, quickly winning popular support and beating the Almohad governors of Murcia and Valencia. He controlled much of al-Andalus from 1228 to 1237. Seeking to legitimize his rule, he pledged allegiance to the Abbasid caliphs in Baghdad and took the titles of al-Mutawwakil ʿalā Allāh and Prince of the Muslims. To visually distinguish himself from the Almohads, the silver coins he minted were round. On one face they say *Lā ilāha illā Allāh / Muḥammad rasūl Allāh / al-ʻabbāsī imām / al-umma* (There is no deity but God. Muhammad is God's envoy. The ʻAbbāsī is the guide of the community). On the other side they read *al-Mutawakkil / ʿalā Allāh amīr al-muslimīn / Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf / ibn Hūd* (Al-Mutawakkil ʿalā Allāh, the prince of Muslims Muḥammad ibn Yūsuf Ibn Hūd).

In 1981, a hoard of dirhams was discovered in the Castle of Quípar (Cehegín, Murcia), which is preserved in the Santa Clara Museum of Murcia.[61] It contained 198 Almohad silver square coins, and two circular ones with the name of al-Mutawakkil Ibn Hūd. These latter two, which are those that date the hoard after 1228, had been used as ring bezels, as attested by the remains of the tabs soldered on their backs where once the hoops were attached that are now lost. On the visible face, we read *Lā ilāha illā Allāh / Muḥammad rasūl Allāh / al-ʻabbāsī imām / al-umma*; the hidden side indicates that they were issued by Ibn Hūd. The Instituto Valencia de Don Juan (Madrid) preserves a complete ring made with a similar silver coin of al-Mutawakkil Ibn Hūd of Murcia.[62] The Cabinet of Antiquities of the Royal Academy of History (RAH) in Madrid keeps another two of such dirhams with the remains of the tabs of the rings to which they were attached.[63] In all cases, the visible face is the same. A somewhat smaller coin of al-Mutawakkil

60 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, nos. 130, 129. Another such ring was found in Manises during the excavations of 2000–2001, see Blanes, *Museu de Ceràmica*, 208–9.

61 Labarta, "Joyas medievales," 93.

62 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, no. 131.

63 RAH cat. nos. 3430 and 3432; Canto et al., *Monedas*, 299 and 32 fig. 19.

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shows on the visible face *al-ḥamd li-llāh / rabb / al-ʿālamīn* (Praise be to God, Lord of the worlds) while it preserves the remnants of two tabs on the face that reads *al-Mutawakkil / ʿalā Allāh Muḥammad ibn / Yūsuf ibn Hūd*.[64]

It is worth asking ourselves whether those coin-rings were used only because they show the profession of faith, or if the phrase they exhibit following it might be an additional reason for their use. A group of coins, the square ones, express their support for the *Mahdi* Ibn Tūmart as head of the community, and are consequently pro-Almohad. The round coins issued by Ibn Hūd are anti-Almohad because they declare their obedience to the Eastern ʿAbbasid authority and thereby externalize the belief in the political and religious unity of the entire Islamic community. If my suggestion is correct, we would thus have evidence that, in addition to the purely religious ones, there also was a group of rings that revealed political allegiances that were communicated through their shape and inscription.[65]

Decorative Rings

The surviving rings discussed so far, as well as the chroniclers writing about these artifacts, confirm their religious, political and judicial importance. We would almost forget that rings are also decorative items that adorn the hand, are part of bodily movements and gestures, and therefore also suitable to forge more intimate connections.

As mentioned, when ʿAbd al-Raḥmān II lost his signet-ring, he had a new motto engraved on another personal ring; similarly, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān III gave away one of his rings (*khātam min khawātimi-hi*). It shows that these caliphs owned several rings, but we do not know what they looked like nor when they wore them. The same goes with ʿAbd Allāh ibn Bulughghīn, the last Zīrid king of Granada who was dethroned by the Almoravids (1090). He narrates in his memoirs:

> I had brought out with me from Granada a golden casket containing ten necklaces of the most precious pearls as well as gold amounting to 16.000 Almoravid dinars and some rings. [Gharūr] took the casket, with all the pearls and rings it contained ... On my arrival at Meknes, Gharūr wrote to me saying: 'Tell me about the ring which you took out with you'. I had taken it off my finger and sold it for ten dinars. In reply, I let him know that I needed the money I got for it.[66]

64 RAH cat. no. 3424, 14 mm; Canto et al., *Monedas*, 299.

65 Labarta, "Joyas medievales," 92–94, paragraph 6.

66 ʿAbd Allāh Ibn Bulughghīn, *Kitāb al-tibyān*, 156, 157, 161.

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While the marriage commitment was sealed with the delivery of a ring in the Christian and Jewish environments of the late thirteenth century and during the fourteenth century, it does not appear that Muslims used engagement or wedding rings; or at least it is not attested in the sources. According to the marriage contracts that are preserved—most of them from the area around Granada and dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—we learn that the jewels given to the bride by her family are one or two necklaces made of gold and small pearls, while the groom contributes two gold bracelets and two gold temple-ornaments.[67] Finger-rings are not cited.

This coincides with the profusely illustrated works ordered by King Alfonso X. In his *Libro de axedrez, dados e tablas* (Book of chess, dice, and tables, ca. 1283), several Muslim women are seen wearing bracelets, necklaces, and earrings; their fingers are dyed with henna, but none of them wears a ring.[68] Neither do men nor any of the characters depicted in the *Cantigas de Santa María*, although we find people of all ranks and social groups in the scenes: kings, apothecaries, sages, members of military orders, Christians, Muslims and Jews, Iberian and foreign. Only two *cantigas* involve rings, but both stray from our requirements: one regards that of the Christian king Fernando III;[69] the second one belonged to a German young man who handed it to an image of Virgin Mary for safekeeping while he was playing ball, which she interpreted as a love vow to her.[70]

We have eight pages of an Arabic notebook with some twenty short love poems or songs, whose references to the Alhambra and its geographical surroundings suggest that they were composed in a Granada environment at the end of the fifteenth century.[71] The author expresses the harmful passion that burns within him, complains of betrayals, changes of mind and rejections, or expresses his happiness after a healing intimate encounter. Several poems allude to the practice of the lover giving a ring to his beloved after having had such an encounter on the sly. The wearing of the ring revealed then the relationship, while being at the same time a symbol of fidelity.[72] As somebody sang: "I've got a ring that helps me against what you know. / Who

67 Martínez Ruiz, *Inventarios*, 213–93.

68 Alfonso X, *Libro de axedrez, dados e tablas*, Escorial, T-I-6, fols. 18r, 40v, 48r, 54r.

69 BNCF, Banco Rari 20, 28, https://archive.org/details/b.-r.-20/page/n28/mode/1up?view=theater.

70 Alfonso X, *Cantigas de Santa María*, Escorial, Códice rico, fol. 61v.

71 *Cancionero morisco*, 30–31 (BHUV 966,9) and 429–44, poems 78–101.

72 *Cancionero morisco*, 442, poem 98 (An emerald ring is his talisman in my hand); 443, poem 100 (A ring has been given to me as a signal).

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will be the one to stop me from joining my full moon?"[73] "My precious emerald ring / ... On my finger you put fame / To belittle the one who barred me to join [with you]."[74]

In accordance with the context, we may assume that in the following verses the lover's final proposal was equivalent to an invitation to be seduced and to consent to the union of both:

> A fire of lasting love was lit inside of me / Put it out by joining with me!
> How much I crave you! How much I humble / While you're making fun of me.
> Heal my heart / Let me give you a little ring with a turquoise.[75]

Conclusion

As we have seen, during the first centuries of Muslim presence in the Iberian Peninsula (711–1030), the sovereigns and the elite wore and used a silver seal-ring as an expression of identity and as a display of high rank and effective power. Chroniclers and reality suggest that it was mostly—though not exclusively—a masculine jewel, and its inscription was almost always a combination of the personal name and a pious uttering. Made of silver, not gold, consisting of simple constructions and with affordable stones that were varieties of quartz, not expensive exotic gems, the purpose of those rings was not to show off one's wealth; instead, piety and political affiliations were communicated. Rings, not employed as seals, but purely as religious rings, seem to have been common to men and women between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries, possibly longer, as some have been found in burials.

There are small groups of rings found along with coins and feminine jewellery in hoards hidden around 1010 and later.[76] While many of them have lost their stones, others are still set with pale ochre, green or deep blue glass cabochons; a few are set with a carnelian or rock crystal. None of these are engraved and are thus silent about possible wearers or owners. A few are gold or gilded silver and beautifully decorated with filigree, although their construction is similar to that of the silver ones. They were probably used by women, perhaps during wedding ceremonies; but it remains unclear whether those women were Muslim or not.

73 *Cancionero morisco*, 441, poem 97.

74 *Cancionero morisco*, 441, poem 96.

75 *Cancionero morisco*, 433, poem 83.

76 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 106–7, 112–13, 114–18, 118–19, 143–44, 147–48, 148–50.

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Chapter 6

AS A SEAL OR A SIGN

BISHOPS' RINGS AND THEIR METAPHORS

JULIETTE CALVARIN

A RING CAN be given by a king as a token of a greater gift, such as land or office. In that case, the ring functions as the means by which the gift is given, and also as a visible sign of the gift.[1] Similarly, a treasurer or someone else acting on behalf of a king carries documents sealed with the king's seal authorizing him to dispense largesse. The king's seal both signifies the officer's authority and, in practical terms, creates it.

These two examples are paraphrased from a treatise by William of Auvergne (ca. 1180–1249), who used them to explain the role of visible signs in the sacraments—signs like water in baptism.[2] Water is a sign, a metaphor, of the spiritual cleansing of baptism, but water is also part of an efficacious ritual: those washed with water using the correct formula are baptized and thus part of the Christian community. William used the ring and seal to explain how this works. According to him, these various signs

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1 For an example of such a token, see Chapter 3 in this volume.

2 "Quemadmodum anulus regius signum est doni, quo quis per eum investitur… et quemadmodum ad sigillum regium thesaurizarius seu dispensator eiusdem regis, dat dona regalia illud portanti, ubi verum, et non furtivum illud esse cognoverit." From William of Auvergne, "De sacramento baptismi," 422; cited from Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 543n85. According to Rosier-Catach, the tract on Baptism dates to around 1228, before the better-known "De legibus," which, however, offers a similar analysis of some of these signs.

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operate by institution or, to use the language favoured by modern scholars, covenant: God or the king says that these signs have meaning, and agrees to abide by them in the future. Because the king—and by extension the society which operates under his authority—agrees to recognize such signs, treating the wearer of the ring as the legitimate holder of the office and so on, the signs cause that which they signify.[3]

As regent master of the University of Paris, close confidant of Louis IX, canon of the cathedral chapter and, starting in 1228, bishop of Paris, William was as familiar with current forms of official practice as he was with theological debate on the nature of the sacraments.[4] He wore a ring and used a seal. And although he does not name the bishop's ring specifically in his examples, they can nonetheless serve as a jumping-off point for thinking about the bishop's ring as it relates to the office of bishop.

The first point to note is that William uses the ring, and specifically the gift of a ring, as an example of this sort of efficacious sign. In this, he was echoing much older concerns, as evidenced by the word he uses: *investitur*. The example of the ring is, in fact, lifted from a list of investiture tokens in a sermon on the sacraments delivered by Bernard of Clairvaux in 1139, less than twenty years after the Concordat of Worms (1122) partly resolved the Investiture Controversy.[5] As Bernard explained, much as the signs of investiture differ according to the office being invested (a book for a canon, a staff for an abbot, a ring and a staff for a bishop), so the sacraments differed in their form according to the variety of grace that they confer. By implication, a ring, when given by the right person, in the right circumstances, and with the right intent, conferred the office of bishop and as such had some real (social and/or sacramental) causal power.[6] This position is, to some extent, a necessary consequence of the papal stance on Investiture: only archbishops and popes were authorized to hand over the

3 On covenantal causality, Courtenay, "The King and the Leaden Coin," and more recently Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*. In modern terminology, following J. L. Austin, we would call these signs "performatives."

4 As Brigitte Bedos-Rezak has argued, it was common until the thirteenth century for "chancery-scholars" to be deeply involved in both discourses; Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 95–107.

5 See Courtenay, "Sacrament, Symbol and Causality in Bernard of Clairvaux."

6 Earlier in the sermon, the causal nature is more explicit: "datur anulus absolute propter anulum, et nulla est significatio; datur ad investiendum de hereditate aliqua, et signum est, ita ut iam dicere possit qui accipit, 'anulus non valet quidquam, sed hereditas est quam quaerebam.'" Bernard of Clairvaux, "In Cena Domini," *Sancti Bernardi Opera*, vol. 5, *Sermones II*, ed. Leclercq, 67–72.

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ring and staff because this act had consequences.[7] While William has a different analysis of how the bishop's ring works, he clearly inherits from his monastic predecessor a sense of the handover's importance. For both men, gifts of rings, including and perhaps especially bishops' rings, are paradigmatic performative signs.

The prolonged conflict about investiture was not the only reason why rings were paradigmatic signs. In the texts which surrounded the ritual use of bishops' rings—both the short formulas said when they were put on and the longer explanations of their significance in liturgical commentaries—rings are often called "signs." More precisely, rings, much more than other items of clerical dress, are attached to the Latin root *sign-*: a ring is a *signum* or a *signaculum*; the beringed bishop is *insignitus*, and the ring signs or *signat*.

It is here that another feature of William of Auvergne's text becomes interesting: he juxtaposes rings with seals, which he understands to be similar kinds of signs.[8] Indeed, the sign (*signum*) and the seal (*sigillum*) are closely connected etymologically, and it is because rings are used for sealing that the root *sign-* was so often tied to them—a connection retained in the modern English word "signet."[9] For a variety of reasons, not least changes in sealing practice, these associations had largely faded by the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. This chapter will attempt to trace the fate of the episcopal signet ring as lived reality, symbol, and afterimage, and in doing so try to bring different, usually separate, scholarly discourses—on liturgical history, semiotic theory, and sigillography—to bear on a small selection of rings found in episcopal tombs.[10]

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7 For more on the Investiture Controversy, see below, in the section "By Ring and Staff."

8 This also represents an effacement of the specific features of sealing; see Bedos-Rezak, "The Ambiguity of Representation."

9 Especially for *signaculum*, seal or signet seems to be the primary meaning: see, for instance, Ducange: "Signaculum, quod alicujus rei ad hoc imprimitur, ut lateat, quousque reseratur." Uses documented by Ducange run from the letters of St. Jerome and other late-antique writers to common formulas in charters. The word *sigillum* is another diminutive of *signum*. See Harvey, "This is a Seal." I thank Jitske Jasperse for this reference.

10 For a variety of practical reasons, discussed in the text below, episcopal rings have not been the subject of much systematic study in the past century. The standard work thus remains Deloche, *Le port des anneaux*; for a more up-to-date overview and typology, see Cherry, "Medieval Episcopal Ring."

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Episcopal Signets in the Early Middle Ages

Like many other elements of clerical dress (and unlike more visible insignia such as the mitre), the bishop's ring was a codified form of what had been a common item of wear for late antique elites. Signet rings were worn by both men and women to seal correspondence and containers, and thus formed a part of the apparatus for managing property and personnel in a (late) Roman household.[11] As such, they belonged to the panoply of the bishop in his role as the administrator of the church, as well as increasingly of the *civitas*, in the late Roman and early medieval world.[12] Indeed, archaeologists have identified some monogrammed signet rings as belonging to bishops: Endulus, Bishop of Toul in the early seventh century, was buried along with a ring bearing his name in a cemetery near the abbey of Saint-Èvre.[13] In a tomb *ad sanctum* in Saint-Martial in Limoges, the corpse held a staff of some sort in both hands and wore a ring with two, diametrically opposed, bezels: an intaglio of a Victory on one side, and a stylized letter A on the other. The tomb's position and its grave goods also suggest an episcopal occupant, likely a sixth- or seventh-century bishop of Limoges.[14]

We do not know whether these men considered their rings to be personal insignias or official pontifical rings as they would be defined in later centuries.[15] This is one of the many difficulties besetting the study of episcopal rings: when a bishop wears one of more rings, it is unclear whether it is to be considered an episcopal ring (or, when there are multiple, which one).[16] These uncertainties are magnified for the earlier period, making direct correlations between objects and concepts difficult. Even without being able to resolve these questions (which may be anachronistic at any rate), it is nonetheless helpful to consider the relationship between the bishop's ring as it appears in normative texts and real rings worn by real bishops.[17]

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11 Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 308–9.

12 So, as noted by several scholars, Bishop Avitus of Vienne wrote a letter of thanks to his brother for the gift of a seal-ring, which he called a "signatorium." "Epistola 78," in Avitus of Vienne, *Epistolae*, col. 280.

13 Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers," 310, and Lièger et al., "Sépultures mérovingiennes."

14 Dąbrowska-Zawadzka, "La tombe de l'évêque A."

15 Cf. Cherry, "Medieval Episcopal Ring," 217.

16 For rings and their connection with bishops, see also Chapter 7 in this volume.

17 It may be helpful to imagine a version of our modern society in which one could signal marital status by wearing any ring on the correct finger, not necessarily a ring

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It does seem clear from the texts that, in the seventh century, some people considered a ring an official sign of a bishop's office, and that the ring thus envisioned was a seal ring, like the rings found in Limoges and Toul. The earliest evidence comes from Isidore of Seville's work *On the Divine Offices*, which offered interpretations for the crozier and the ring, the bishop's two distinguishing props. While he discusses the crozier within a pastoral metaphor, he calls the ring a *signum*. "He is also given a ring as a sign [*signum*] of episcopal honour and for the sealing of secrets [*vel signaculum secretorum*]. For there are many things that ... priests establish as 'under the seal' [*sub signaculo*] lest the sacraments of God be exposed to those who are unworthy."[18]

Isidore transfers to a spiritual sphere the pragmatic, physical act of late antique sealing: closing and, via closing, concealing. The emphasis on secrecy speaks to late-antique church norms in which parts of the liturgy were limited to those more thoroughly instructed in the faith,[19] but Isidore's language also discloses more administrative concerns. In the next paragraph, he goes on to warn against the ordination of unworthy priests and bishops.[20] Decisions about appointments are among the activities which might be conducted by sealed correspondence: Isidore himself notes that all bishops of the province were required to acquiesce in a new bishop's consecration, "no fewer than three being present, the others nonetheless consenting by the testimony of letters."[21] The seal rings of the acquiescing bishops act, theoretically, to protect the office from unworthy men.

Other, later, sources further document the use of seal rings within religious ritual in Iberia. For instance, tenth- and eleventh-century pontificals in Vic and Narbonne provide for sealing the relic containers within altars with "the bishop's seal," (*episcopus sigillum*), and indeed seal impressions, largely from signet rings, have been found on many such relic containers from Catalunya.[22] The practice is probably older than the pontificals themselves, although perhaps not reaching back to Isidore's day. Nonetheless, in

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used in the marriage ceremony itself. The relationship between rings and views of marriage would therefore be looser, but nonetheless important.

18 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, ed. Lawson, 60; English trans. Koebler, 74. (bk 2, ch. 5, par. 12).

19 For the evolution of these norms to the sixth century, see Saxer, *Les rites de l'initiation.*

20 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, II.v.12, p. 60.

21 Isidore of Seville, *De ecclesiasticis officiis*, II.v.11, p. 60; trans. Koebler, 74.

22 Sureda i Jubany, "Lipsanothèques, reliques et autels en Catalogne romane,"

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sealing away and thereby guaranteeing the relics of altars around the millenium, bishops and their rings were enacting a protection of holy matter in terms close to Isidore's. Even without such explicit ritual contexts, the use of the seal ring for administrative purposes, such as giving one's consent to an election, suggests a fluid exchange between the seal ring's pragmatic and metaphorical functions. Central to the fluidity of this exchange is the productive ambiguity in Isidore's Latin of the word *signum* and its diminutive *signaculum*, hovering between abstract sign and concrete seal.

A similar ambiguity is at play in the earliest known liturgical form accompanying the handover of the bishop's ring during the consecration rite. The Carolingian bishop Hincmar of Rheims, prescribing a rite for episcopal consecration in a letter to Adventius, Bishop of Metz, provides this formula for the act of putting the ring on the new bishop's finger: "This is the seal [*signum*] of faith, that you may seal [*signet*] those things of the divine mysteries which are to be sealed, and open [*aperiat*] those which are to be open."[23] A similar but more extensive formula survives in late tenth-century Anglo-Saxon pontificals, from St.-Germans in Cornwall and Winchester, as well as in a contemporary sacramentary from Corbie:

> Take the ring of discretion and honour, the seal [*signum*] of faith; that you may seal what is to be sealed, and open what is to be opened, tie what is to be tied and loosen what is to be loosened, and open the doors of the heavenly kingdom to the believers by the faith of baptism, but to the fallen and penitent with the ministry of reconciliation.[24]

33–34. At least one, twelfth-century, container, has been found with impressions from a larger mandorla-shaped seal, speaking to the decline of the signet ring.

23 "et mittat annulum in dexterae manus digito qui praecedit minimum, dicans a quid illi annulus datur, Signum et enim fidei, ut audientibus se ex divinis mysteriis signet quae et quibus signanda sunt, et aperiat quae et quibus aperianda sunt." The letter is edited with commentary in Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," here p. 54. For reasons of narrative flow, Hincmar uses the third person; I give a reverse-engineered second-person version following Andrieu. Andrieu assumes that the forms reflect those then in use in Reims and Sens, where Hincmar was consecrated.

24 "Accipe anulum discretionis et honoris et fidei signum, ut que signanda sunt signes et que aperienda sunt prodas, que liganda sunt liges et que solvenda sunt solvas, atque credentibus per fidem subvenias, lapsis autem et penitentibus per misterium reconciliationis ianuas regni celestis aperias, cunctis vero de thesauris dominicis nova et vetera proferas, ad eternam salutem hominibus consulas gratia domini nostri Ieus Christi," Cited from Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," 58; and Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, MS latin 12502, fol. 16r, Sacramentary commissioned by Ratoldus of Corbie.

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In these texts, the ring is primarily understood as a seal matrix, enabling the bishop to act in a way that seals and signs (*signet*), but the language is, again, productively ambiguous: it is also possible to understand the ring in the opening sentence as an impression marking, or sealing, the new bishop.

A New Metaphor: The Vicar and the Bride

The tenth century saw the appearance of a new interpretation of the bishop's ring in Gallic pontificals, alongside the seal metaphor. One book from Aurillac contains the following prayer for handing over the ring: "With this ring of faith we commend to you the bride of Christ, the unharmed Church, so that you may keep her holy and immaculate in His sight."[25] Another form, from Sens, reads "take the ring of holy devotion, marked [*insignitus*] by which you may sincerely keep the bride of God and make the holy people overflow with divine deeds."[26] In these forms, the idea of the bishop as sealed and sealing by his ring has been largely replaced by an equally complex metaphor, in which he is a keeper or custodian of Christ's bride, the universal Church. Though not himself the bridegroom—that role is reserved for Christ—the bishop acts in his stead and as such wears something like a marriage ring.[27]

The marriage metaphor, as attested by these liturgical formulas, became dominant in later centuries. The form in which it entered Roman use,[28] and which became generalized in the pontifical of William Durandus (ca. 1230–1296) in the late thirteenth century, is known from the eleventh:[29] "Take this ring, that is the seal of faith [*fidei signaculum*], so

25 "Sub hoc anulo fidei commendamus tibi sponsam Christi, illibatam ecclesiam, ut eam sanctam et immaculatam custodias in conspectu illius in omni bonitate." Now Albi, Médiathèque Pierre Amalric, MS 34, fol. 17v.

26 "Accipe anulum sacre devotionis, quo insignitus sponsam Dei sinceriter custodias et populum sanctum divinis effectibus habundare facias." The manuscript is now in St. Petersburg; cited from Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," 57.

27 See the extended discussion of this metaphor in Labhart, *Zur Rechtssymbolik des Bischofsring*, 30–51.

28 Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 1: Le pontifical romain du XIIe siècle*; and *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 2: Le pontifical de la curie romaine au XIIIe siècle*, XI.29.

29 In addition to the PRG tradition discussed below and other contemporary manuscripts, the prayer is found in Wolfenbüttel, Herzog August Bibliothek (HAB), Codex Guelph. 7.2 Aug. 4o, fol. 26r, within a rite for ordaining bishops inserted as a separate quire into a collection of episcopal liturgy. Parkes argues, largely on paleographic

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that you, adorned with uncorrupted faith, may keep the Lord's bride, namely the Holy Church, unharmed."[30] This prayer, although focused on the marriage metaphor, inserts the language of the seal: the *signaculum* or signet is inherited from Isidore's and other commentaries. Taking this language seriously, one can read the seal in two ways. On the one hand, it acts as a delegation of authority: the bishop is assigned to watch over God's bride, and like the chancellor or royal official, is given a seal ring to do so.[31] This authority is also a responsibility: the bishop is being reminded of his duty and faithfulness in a formulation that emphasizes avoiding conflicts of interests. Importantly, therefore, it is also the bishop here who is sealed or marked by faith.

Among the early witnesses to this prayer are the complex compilations of Frankish, Roman, and other liturgical sources known collectively as the "Pontifical romano-germanique" or PRG, within at least two different recensions of the episcopal consecration.[32] While one version only includes the *signaculum fidei* prayer, another situates it within a three-prayer sequence for the ring (interwoven with three prayers for the crozier).[33] First comes a benediction of the ring upon the altar, in which it is called a "sign [*signum*] of most holy faith" which might designate a wearer (who is then *insignitus*).[34]

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grounds, that the *ordo* was copied and inserted into the codex in the cathedral scriptorium in Mainz in the eleventh century; *The Making of Liturgy in the Ottonian Church*, 141.

30 "Accipe anulum scilicet fidei signaculum. quatinus sponsam dei sanctam videlicet ecclesiam intemerata fide ornatus illibata custodias. Per dominum." Cited from the pontifical of William Durandus, I.XIV.42, ed. Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 3: Le pontifical de Guillaume Durand*.

31 For (seal) rings as tokens of delegation and obligation for worldly office, see Depreux, "Investitura per anulum et baculum," 179–80.

32 The edition is Vogel and Elze, *PRG*. For a critical review of the edition's history and a challenge of the traditional attribution to Mainz, see Parkes, "Questioning the Authority of Vogel and Elze's Pontifical Romano-Germanique." The *ordo* of episcopal consecration (ch. 63 in Vogel and Elze's edition) is one of the core elements of the PRG tradition and survives in most manuscripts of the group, albeit with significant variations; Parkes, "Questioning the Authority of Vogel and Elze's Pontifical Romano-Germanique," 82.

33 The longer form is found in the manuscripts of Vogel's group 1, which he considered to have the original sequencing of items but later versions of some rites, including episcopal consecration. See Vogel and Elze, *PRG* 1:220–23 (I.LXII.37–45).

34 "Benedictio anuli: Creator et conservator humani generis, dator gratie spiritualis, largitor eterne salutis, tu, domine, permitte tuam benedictionem super hunc anulum

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A second prayer, said when giving the ring (*quando datur*), repeats the extended seal metaphor seen in Anglo-Saxon pontificals: "so that you may seal what is to be sealed and open what is to be opened.[35] Lastly, the *signaculum fidei* prayer is said "upon putting the ring on the finger," distinguishing that act as connected to marriage and completing an act of sealing. One last prayer, given as an alternate in some manuscripts and appended to the *signaculum fidei* in at least one other, pushes the marriage metaphor further: "remember the marriage and betrothal of the church," it instructs the new bishop, "and beware lest you forget it."[36]

The extended version of the rite testifies to the strength of the sealing metaphor in the eleventh century, as well as to its potential integration with the marriage metaphor. It should be noted that this sequence of prayers may not have been performed as such, but may rather represent an attempt to bring together or reconcile different traditions; it has been argued that such reconciliation was the purpose of the PRG compilation in general.[37] If so, the complex handover of the ring in three moments may have been a maximalist version for consultation purposes. Nonetheless, the sequence possesses a logic of its own, the ring shifting from signet to wedding band as the emphasis moves from the object itself to its appearance on the bishop's body.

Later Roman pontificals edited by Michel Andrieu include only the *signaculum fidei* prayer, while Durandus' pontifical, compiled in the closing decades of the thirteenth century, includes the benediction from the PRG as well; but the addition of the two other prayers (*que signanda sunt* and *memor sponsionis*) in the margins of an early copy of the latter, made for use in Autun, confirms the long circulation of all four texts.[38]

ut qui hoc sacrosancte fidei signo insignitus incedat, in virtute celestis defensionis ad eternam sic proficiat." Vogel and Elze, *PRG*, 1:221.

35 "Quando datur anulus dicatur: accipe anulum discretionis et honoris, fidei signum, ut que signanda sunt signes." Vogel and Elze, *PRG*, 1:221. Full text as in n. 24 above.

36 "Memor sponsionis et desponsationis ecclesiasticae et dilectionis domini Dei tui; in die qua assecutus es hunc honorem cave, ne obliviscaris illius." Vogel and Elze, *PRG*, 1:222.

37 See Parkes, "Questioning the Authority of Vogel and Elze's Pontifical Romano-Germanique," and Parkes, *The Making of Liturgy in the Ottonian Church*, esp. 198–205.

38 Andrieu, *Le pontifical romain au Moyen Âge 3: Le pontifical de Guillaume Durand*, I.XIV.42; the manuscript in question is Lyon, Bibliothèque de l'université, cod. 11.

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The Sign of Aribo Archbishop

Some confirmation that the *signaculum fidei* in tenth- and eleventh-century prayers was still understood as a reference to sealing comes from a ring found in the grave of an archbishop of Mainz (Figure 6.1). Aribo, who served as archbishop from 1021 to 1031, was very likely consecrated using this prayer,[39] and the ring found in his grave materializes the symbolism of the signet: its small-ish bezel (1.2 by 1.4 cm) contains a flat inscription zone arranged around an amethyst.[40] Such a format, in a signet ring, allowed for a personalized inscription to be joined to a foreign, even pagan theme shown on an engraved gem. The inscription on Aribo's ring correspondingly names him and his office, starting with the customary cross of seal inscriptions: "+ ARIBO ARCHIEPS" (Archbishop Aribo). The text, however, is not mirrored, but reads normally when looking at the ring—it would be illegible if impressed. Moreover, the letters are filled in with niello, enhancing their legibility on the gold ground of the ring itself but decreasing their functionality as a matrix.[41] The ring was an image of a signet: a sign or insignia in the form of a *signaculum*.

Worn on his own finger, Aribo's ring advertised his name and his rank. In a way, this seems superfluous: anyone who saw the ring close enough to read its inscription already knew who the archbishop was. It may have been sent with a messenger as a guarantee of delegated authority,[42] but such use would surely have been exceptional: unlike a seal, which allows the authoritative material presence of the sealer to be multiplied, the ring remained a singular object, and its normal place was on the owner's hand. The ring, therefore, likely did not serve to identify Aribo; rather, it materialized the union of person and office. As the archbishop performed the various blessings and offices that were his prerogative—consecrating churches,

39 According to Parkes, the main witness for this would be the Wolfenbüttel manuscript HAB, Cod. Guelph. 7.2 Aug. 4o; see n. 30 above.

40 Sanke, *Gräber* (CD-Rom), Kat.–Nr. D 16.1. Aribo died while returning from a pilgrimage to Rome, and his body must have been carried back to Mainz; he was buried in the western crossing of the double-choired cathedral church begun under his predecessor Willigis. A tablet-woven gold band was also found in the grave and attributed to some sort of head-covering.

41 Argued also in *Deutsche Inschriften Online* by Fuchs, Hedtke, and Kern, "SN1, Nr. 6 (Ring des Aribo)," www.inschriften.net (unique identifier urn:nbn:de:0238-di002mz00k0000603).

42 See Labhardt, *Zur Rechtssymbolik des Bischofsrings*, 97, for the practice of giving a messenger a ring. See also Chapter 5 in this volume.

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Figure 6.1. Ring of Aribo, Archbishop of Mainz, 1021–1031. Gold and amethyst; diameter 2.6 cm. Found 1928, in a grave in the west crossing of Mainz cathedral. Mainz, Diocesan Museum, inv. nr. S 00062. © Bischöfliches Dom- und Diözesanmuseum Mainz. Photo by Marcel Schawe, reproduced courtesy of the Dom- und Diözesanmuseum.

ordaining priests, perhaps presiding over synods—the signet-lookalike on his finger "sealed" his actions with his dual, personal and institutional, authority.

At the same time, the legibility of Aribo's ring, as though it were an impression rather than a matrix, highlights the other potential reading of the seal metaphor: with the ring, Aribo himself is sealed. Here, the small cross in the inscription is crucial. P. D. A. Harvey has recently argued that such crosses, in conjunction with the word *sigillum* or the abbreviation *S* found in many seal legends (starting in late Anglo-Saxon England), align the seal with written and, more importantly, gestured crosses made when signing documents.[43] The seal, with its cross, becomes a lasting witness to an ephemeral gesture, the sign of the cross, made by human witnesses over the document.[44] Similarly, the bishop's ring serves as one of several visible, durable witnesses to the ephemeral consecration rite, during which the sign of the cross was made over him several times, including (starting in the Carolingian period) with the oil of unction on his forehead and right hand.[45] In most versions of the rite, it is immediately following the anointing that the ring and staff are blessed and handed to the bishop.[46] At this point, the sign of the cross would additionally be made over the ring at the altar, when, as we saw, a common prayer

43 Harvey, "This is a Seal," 2.

44 The difficulty of writing this sentence, in which "signing" a document and "signing" oneself evoke radically different actions, speaks to the importance of these different identifying and legitimizing signs; see also Fraenkel, *La signature*.

45 For the introduction of anointing see Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," 39–54.

46 Andrieu, "Le sacre épiscopal d'après Hincmar," 56–57. For an overview of diversity around the year 1000, Méhu, "L'ordination de évêque," esp. 88–89 for the ring.

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called it "this most holy sign/seal of faith" (*sacrosanctum fidei signum*) with which the new bishop would be *insignitus*. It is not difficult, in those circumstances, to see the ring as incorporating and commemorating that other "most holy sign of the faith," the gesture of the cross. Wearing his ring, Aribo was *insignitus*, signed with the cross, as Aribo Archiepiscopus.[47]

It is always a challenge, when considering grave goods, to know how and whether they were used in life. Aribo's ring was probably not made directly for burial—burial goods are typically made of cheaper materials, and this ring is pure gold—but we cannot know when it was worn in life. There are, however, textual sources mentioning rings in connection with Aribo. His rise to the archdiocesan see is described in the *Vitae* of two bishops of Hildesheim involved in a jurisdictional dispute with Mainz over the abbey of Gandersheim.[48] According to the *Vita posterior* of Godehard of Hildesheim, Aribo was chosen or "*praesignatum*" by the gift of a ring from the emperor, Henry II. Being, at the time, an imperial *capellanus* and not yet a priest, he was ordained by Bernward of Hildesheim at Gandersheim itself, and only later consecrated as archbishop by Ekkehard of Schleswig.[49] This sequence exemplifies the multi-stage ritual of enthroning new Ottonian bishops, elegantly described by Timothy Reuter: first singled out by the gift of a ring and/or staff, new bishops were consecrated by their fellow bishops, and separately enthroned in their new cathedral church.[50] These different steps can be understood as representing the layers and spheres of a bishop's authority, his "two bodies" as urban ruler and font of sacramental power.

Within this sequence, the first gift of a ring from the emperor is both a sign (Aribo is *praesignatus*) of the consecration to come, and an act of delegation of authority. For the archbishop of Mainz in particular, traditionally

47 Again, there is a productive cycle at play, for the blessing of Aribo's hands is what then allowed him to confirm young Christians by tracing the cross on their forehead with his anointed thumb. The logic of transference resonates with metaphors of impression.

48 See the discussion in Depreux, "'Investitura per anulum et baculum,'" 192–94.

49 "Huic autem Aribo regius cappellanus successit, quem imperialis anuli dono regio more praesignatum Bernwardus episcopus ad principale altare praenotatae Gandisheimensis ecclesiae presbyterium ordinavit." *Vita Godehardi episcopi posterior*, ed. Pertz, 205–6. Wolfhere's two lives of Godehard, like Thangmar's life of Bernward, insist on Aribo's quarrelsome personality, as a result of the long dispute over the canonesses of Gandersheim; the account of Aribo's consecration seems designed to stress the rights of Hildesheim. See the different accounts gathered in Böjmer, *Regesta archi. maguntinensium* I, 150–51.

50 Reuter, "Bishops, Rites of Passage, and the Symbolism of State," 31–33.

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archchancellor of the Empire, the signet ring functioned particularly well as a symbol of such authority. Afterwards, a ring—perhaps the same but perhaps not—was placed on the altar, blessed by Ekkehard of Schleswig, and handed to Aribo with the *signaculum fidei* prayer. Spiritual powers of sealing joined the administrative ones already conferred.[51] It is unclear whether either of these rings is the one Aribo took to his grave: while it seems unlikely that Henry would have had a ring made at short notice to select his candidate, Aribo would have had a few months to commission the ring for his consecration.[52] He could also, of course, have had it made at any time in the subsequent decade.

By Ring and Staff

Neither of the writers who described Aribo's consecration objected to his selection by the emperor, or to Henry II's use of a ring to signal that selection. Later in the eleventh century, however, these practices became the object of a major controversy between the pope and the emperor. Starting or intensifying with the papacy of Gregory VII in the 1070s, the papacy challenged the right of emperors, and other laymen, to appoint bishops.[53] In the ensuing decades of conflict and propaganda, a period known as the Investiture Controversy, the handover of the liturgical insignias of ring and crozier became a powerful symbol for lay infringement on properly clerical

51 Többelmann has similarly argued that the crozier was always a twofold (*duplex*) sign of temporal and spiritual power, which he sees as setting it apart from the ring. Többelmann, *Stäbe der Macht*, 218–25.

52 The non-identity of consecration and pontifical rings is another of the difficulties in the study of episcopal rings. By the twelfth century at the latest, these would normally be different: Roman pontificals of the time explicitly prescribe the use of two rings in the consecration rite (*Provideat autem ipse electus ... anulus pontificalis et alius anulus parvus*): the consecration ring proper, sized to be worn on the bare hand, which is blessed and handed over with the prayers we have been discussing, and a separate "pontifical ring," sized to be worn over a glove, which is worn by the new bishop upon exiting the church of consecration. Andrieu, *Le pontifical de la curie*, XI.9. The use of episcopal gloves was developing in Aribo's day, but he does not seem to have been buried with them. Therefore, the ring worn over his bare finger may still have been the pontifical ring. For the history and significance of episcopal gloves, see Fahrnbauer, "Handlungen mit Handschuhen."

53 For introductions to the events and the copious bibliography, see Hartmann, *Investiturstreit*, and the essays gathered in Jarnut and Wemhoff, eds., *Vom Umbruch zur Erneuerung?* For a concise introduction in English, see Malegam, "Pro-Papacy Polemic."

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matters. The eventual compromise at Worms in 1122 conceded imperial influence on appointments, and even a ceremony of investiture, but not the use of the ring and staff.[54] During this period, writers on either side of the conflict wrote and disseminated hundreds of pages of polemical texts arguing for or against the emperor's right to handle or give the ring and staff; and while it is not possible to consider the breadth of this production here, looking at how a few texts from different phases of the crisis used the metaphors of sealing and marriage is nonetheless instructive.[55]

Towards the middle of the eleventh century, a book on simony by the cardinal-bishop Humbert of Silva Candida (ca. 1000–1061) helped usher in the Controversy. The symbolism of the ring, while not central to his argument, appears in one of the middle chapters.

> For the ring points to [*indicat*] the seal [*signaculum*] of heavenly secrets, warning preachers that they should keep the wisdom of God … as sealed [*velut signatam*] away from the imperfect … or that, like the bridegroom's friends, they should always show and praise the bride gift [*arrham fidei*] of his bride, namely the church.[56]

A few chapters later, Humbert seems to summarize this in referring to "the ring of preaching and of betrothal to the church" (*anulus praedicationis seu ecclesiasticae desponsationis*).[57] Humbert uses both the seal and the *arrha*, somewhat awkwardly, as images of an authority to preach: proclaiming Christ's marriage to the church and exercising judgment.[58] Ring and staff together are the visible signs of this authority, which cannot be truly given prior to proper consecration and unction.[59]

54 For more object-oriented discussions, see Tobelmann, *Stäbe der Macht*; and Depreux, "'Investitura per anulum et baculum.'"

55 See Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere*, for the context and reach of the polemic texts.

56 Humbertus of Silva Candida, *Libri III adversus simoniacos*, ed. Thaner, 205 (bk. 3, ch. 6); translation mine. See the discussion in Labhart, *Zur Rechtssymbolik des Bischofsrings*, 82–85.

57 Humbertus of Silva Candida, *Libri III adversus simoniacos*, ed. Thaner, 217 (bk. 3, ch. 15).

58 The link to preaching is more natural in the case of the crozier, which Humbert discusses first.

59 Humbert is concerned that the visible signs should only be given when they correspond to invisible reality, in this case the state of being a consecrated bishop: *Libri III adversus simoniacos*, ed. Thaner, 205 (bk. 3, ch. 6).

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Around 1110, Rangerio, Bishop of Lucca (r. 1092–1112) wrote a long poem "On the Ring and Staff," focused on the sacred signs which should not be sullied by the bloodied hands of a king.[60] Much of the argument's force depended on the idea of marriage, said to be coded in the image of the ring. In the first few lines of the poem, he explains that the ring is the bridegroom's, given to the bride, and that the gem designates the bride and the gold the bridegroom, coming together in a single object.[61] Later, a rhetorical climax is reached when he compares the double rite of investiture and consecration to two conflicting marriages, or bigamy.[62]

Like Humbert, Rangerio is concerned with the possibility that the ring and staff, granted to an unconsecrated man, would be false signs, and he frequently uses language of sealing and impression to make this point. This language, however, is not attached to the ring as a seal matrix, but rather reinforces its meaning as a marriage ring and, just as often, the crozier's as a shepherd's crook: he who seeks the signs/seals (*signacula*) of the shepherd should be a true pastor, or the ring holds the sign/seal of marriage (*signum coniugii*) and expresses (*exprimat*) the marriage bond.[63] In such cases, the seal image has become a paradigm for signification, detached from the ring in particular.

Both Humbert and Rangerio, at different moments in the Investiture Controversy, drew on the available metaphors of the ring (and staff) to make their points that these sacred signs should stay exclusive to clerics. The marriage metaphor, however, with its inherent drive to exclusivity, seems to have been seen as more rhetorically effective as the crisis wore on.

The resolution of the crisis is frequently attributed to the Bishop Ivo of Chartres (bishop from 1090–1115), who in two letters urged moderation on zealous archbishops of Lyon, Hugh and Ioscerannus.[64] In both letters, Ivo

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60 For the phenomenon of polemical poems, appearing in the later period of the controversy, see Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere*, 104–6.

61 "Anulus est Sponsi, sponsae datur anulus, / ut se noverit unius non alium cupere. / Gemma notat sponsam, sponsus signatur ab auro, / haec duo conveniunt, sicut et illa duo." Rangerius of Lucca, *Liber de anulo et baculo*, ed. Sackur, 509.

62 "Ut prius uxorem ducat sub rege licenter / Quam Christi sponsam sentiat, aecclesiam, / et bigamus fiat, cum debeat unius esse." Rangerius, *Liber de anulo et baculo*, ed. Sackur, 523.

63 "Huius coniugii signum tenet anulus ille / quem dat pontifici, qui sacrat ipse Deus. / Scilicet, ut mediut sponsi sponsaeque maritum / exprimat uxori … qui sibi tantarum quaerit signacula rerum / et quod signatur, debet habere simul." Rangerius, *Liber de anulo et baculo*, ed. Sackur, 510.

64 See Laudage, *Gregorianische Reform und Investiturstreit*, 47–58, for an overview

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argued that, while kings should not choose bishops, there was a need for them to concede to each new bishop temporal authority and possessions held in fief. "What does it matter whether this concession is given by the hand, by a nod, by the tongue, or by the staff, as long as the king does not intend to give anything spiritual?" asked Ivo around the year 1096;[65] adding in 1112 that "a layman, who thought that he could confer a sacrament or a sacramental thing [*rem*] of the church in the giving and taking of a staff, we would deem heretical, not because of the manual investiture, but for their diabolical presumption."[66] Though aware of the symbolism of the objects—in his sermon collection, Ivo provided an allegory of priestly vestments to his diocesan clergy[67]—he played it down in these letters. Instead, he favoured a clear, legalistic definition of the act, independent of its outward form and thus independent of any symbolism. Ivo's implicit suggestion eventually became the compromise: kings and emperors could concede *temporalia* to newly elected bishops using a rod or sceptre, not a crozier. Paradoxically, this solution both heightened and hollowed out the significance of the ring and crozier.[68] Ivo's combination of a meaningful act with an arbitrary, because conventional, sign is fundamentally similar to that used by later authors like Bernard of Clairvaux or William of Auvergne.

Signets in the Past Tense

Before and after its resolution, the Investiture Controversy spurred the writing of many new liturgical commentaries: handbooks enabling clerics to read meaning in the "actions, words, and things" of the liturgy.[69] In earlier versions, written by Carolingian prelates, the seal metaphor had been the dominant meaning of the ring. For instance, Hrabanus Maurus, in *De*

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of the traditional position, and Melve, *Inventing the Public Sphere*, 610–21, for a more nuanced position. Ivo's letters, written on behalf of the gathered prelates of the province of Sens, circulated widely, and continued to be copied with the rest of his correspondence long after Ivo's death.

65 Ivo of Chartre, ep. 60, in *Epistolae ad litem investiturarum spectantes*, ed. Sackur, 645; see also the electronic edition and translation by G. Giordanengo, TELMA, https://telma-chartes.irht.cnrs.fr/yves-de-chartres/notice-acte/20997.

66 Ivo of Chartres, ep. 236, in Dümmler et al., *Libelli de Lite*, 2:654; see also https://telma-chartes.irht.cnrs.fr/yves-de-chartres/notice/21174.

67 Ivo of Chartres, Sermo III, in *PL* 162, cols. 525–26.

68 See the analysis in Töbelmann, *Stäbe der Macht*, 219–23.

69 Reynolds, "Liturgical Scholarship," and Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, 58–59.

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Institutione Clericorum, quotes Isidore to call the ring a "sign [*signum*] of pontifical honour or a seal [*signaculum*] of secrets."[70]

Commentators from the period of the Investiture Controversy, however, most prominently Honorius Augustodinensis (d. ca. 1140) and Rupert of Deutz (d. ca. 1129), cite the marriage metaphor rather than the idea of sealing. Rupert briefly names the ring as the *arrha* of Christ's bride, but his focus is on the ring as an active sign: gleaming on the bishop's finger as he ordains different orders of clergy, the ring with its gem symbolized the descent of the Holy Spirit, conferring different gifts on the faithful.[71] This image, while compatible with the active role of the seal ring, relies on light metaphors rather than on any image of closing or sealing. Honorius Augustodinensis, meanwhile, provides glosses associated with the marriage ring and its supposed origin with Prometheus: gold and gems, he says, correspond to love and delight, and the bishop is to remember his duty as a bridegroom.[72] These ideas, unsurprisingly, are close to the ones in Rangerio's polemical poem *On the Ring and Staff*. Although neither Honorius nor Rupert is very descriptive, it is notable that both of them focus on the materials and appearance of the ring, which replace the active function of sealing as anchors for meaning.

Unlike Rupert, Honorius explicitly addressed the older metaphor. "Once," he says, "kings used to sign [*signare*] letters with a ring;" and he repeats the

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70 "Datur et anulus propter signum pontificalis honoris, vel signaculum secretorum. Nam multa sunt, quae ante carnalium minus que intellegentium sensus occultantes sacerdotes quasi sub signaculo condunt, ne indignis quibusque dei sacramenta aperiantur." Rabanus Maurus, *De Institutione Clericorum*, bk. 1, ch. 4. The ring is not discussed in Amalarius of Metz's commentary, *On the Liturgy*.

71 "Anulus digiti donum significat spiritus sancti… Harum diuisiones gratiarum inuisibiles imitatur uisibiliter utpote christi uicarius catholicus pontifex per sacrorum diuisiones ordinum ponens quosdam in ecclesia sacerdotes alios diaconos et ceteros sacri altaris officiales. Latius autem significatio praedicti extenditur anuli quia dum omni ecclesiae sanam doctrinam et fidem integram praedicat uelut oppignoratam anulo sponsam christo subarrat. Non ergo ab re in eius digito gemmatus fulget anulus per cuius ministerium christus dominus tam fulgida distribuit dona sancti spiritus." *Ruperti Tuitiensis Liber de divinis officiis*, 1.25.

72 "Fertur quod Prometheus quidam sapiens primus annulum ferreum ob insigne amoris fecerit, et in eo adamantem lapidem posuerit… Postmodum vero aurei sunt pro ferreis instituti, et gemmis pro adamante insigniti; quia, sicut aurum cuncta metalla praecellit, ita dilectio universa bona excellit, et sicut aurum gemma decoratur, ita amor dilectione perornatur. Pontifex ergo annulum portat, ut se sponsum Ecclesiae agnoscat, ac pro illa animam, si necesse fuerit, sicut Christus, ponat." Honorius, *Jewel of the Soul*, 1.216.

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idea that bishops should "seal" (*sigillet*) mysteries from the unworthy.[73] For Honorius, the use of a signet ring is no longer a live source of metaphor, but a dead practice that must be uncovered behind the words of his sources. Such explanations recur in later authors, most notably William Durandus, whose *Rationale divinorum officiorum* (ca. 1285) became a key text of liturgical knowledge for the next two centuries.[74] The text repeats and expands on the interpretations provided by Rupert and Honorius,[75] but relegates the seal ring to the third and briefest of his paragraphs, where it is prefaced with a similar explanation: "the ancients used to seal documents with rings."[76]

Signet rings had not disappeared from common use by the twelfth and thirteenth century. On the contrary, they seem to have undergone a revival, and many gem-set signet rings survive from the thirteenth century in particular.[77] Honorius's brief statement, therefore, should not be read as indication of his lack of familiarity with this type of object. Rather, it is indicative of various shifts in sealing practices which, as Brigitte Bedos-Rezak has amply documented, changed the modalities by which seals carried meaning. Over the course of the eleventh century, potentates like bishops and counts came to use enlarged seal matrices, too large to be worn as rings, to authenticate charters; these seals typically carried an image representing the seal-bearer.[78] In face of this growing official practice of sealing, signet rings came to be relegated to a second rank, used largely on personal correspondence or as

73 "Annuli usus ex Evangelio acceptus creditur, ubi saginati vituli conviva prima stola vestitur, annulo insignitur (Luc. XV). Olim solebant reges litteras cum annulo signare; cum hoc soliti erant et nobiles quique sponsas subarrhare … Mysteria Scripturae a perfidis sigillet, Secreta Ecclesiae resignet." Honorius, *Jewel of the Soul*, 1.216. These statements are separated from each other by the marriage-ring discussion, above, and no explicit connection is drawn between them.

74 On the *Rationale* and its sources, see most crucially the Introduction to the critical edition, Thibodeau, "Apparatus Fontium," in *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 3:248–69.

75 The episcopal ring as marriage ring, explicitly cross-referenced to the sacrament of marriage, is discussed in *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 3.14.1–2; Rupert's idea of the ring and the Holy Spirit in 3.14.4 and the second half of section 3, expanded with a gloss on the circular shape.

76 *Guillelmi Duranti Rationale divinorum officiorum*, 3.14.3. The section places greater emphasis on revelation over concealment, a shift from the earlier tradition and perhaps another source of discomfort vis-à-vis the seal image.

77 Henig, "The Re-Use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios."

78 Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 90–95.

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counterseals. Correspondingly, the language on the rings themselves often relates to secrecy or privacy.[79]

New practices of sealing differed not only in the size of the matrices, but in the seal impression's life-span. On the letters sealed by seal rings, the seal was broken when the letter was read (by its intended recipient or otherwise): its authority lay in its unbroken state and was one-use-only. In contrast, a seal appended to a charter is (theoretically at least) meant to represent the sigillant's authority as long as the charter itself survives and is no longer positioned in such a way as to forbid access to the text.[80] These changes in sealing practices reinforced the distance between new official seals and personal signet rings. They also changed the metaphorical reach of the seal, from images of closing and protecting towards semantics of resemblance and sameness.[81]

A Paris Ring

A ring found in a bishop's tomb in the choir of Notre-Dame de Paris, now in the Louvre, might be said to exemplify the typology of episcopal rings after the Investiture Crisis (Figure 6.2).[82] While the ring's history is complicated, it seems that it was found in 1858 during Viollet-le-Duc's renovations, in one of four excavated medieval graves. Identified as a bishop's ring by the presence of a wooden crosier in the same tomb, it has been dated on stylistic grounds to the late twelfth or early thirteenth century.[83] The ring likely

79 See the examples in Henig, "The Re-Use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios." For the use of signets, often without an explicit naming of the bearer and therefore relying on personal memory for significance, as counterseals in the twelfth century, see Jasperse, "With This Ring," 76–79.

80 Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 96–100. According to Bedos-Rezak, the modality of the letter in particular implies the importance of a trustworthy messenger, which in turn relates to the role of the (signet) ring as a material trace of delegation.

81 Bedos-Rezak, *When Ego was Imago*, 100–107 and *passim*. Scholastic and pre-scholastic works, including a text by Honorius Augustodinensis, use the word *sigillum* to discuss a wide variety of topics having to do with resemblance, from typology to the divine image to the practices of learning and teaching. See Novikoff, "Anselm, Dialogue, and the Rise of Scholastic Disputation," esp. 414–16, for Honorius' *Sigillum Sante Marie*.

82 Gold with niello and garnet; Paris, Musée du Louvre, OA 3357. See Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau."

83 Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 268–70. See the Preface to this volume for another ring and a seal matrix found during the same excavation. The ring was

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Figure 6.2. Ring called "of Maurice de Sully," probably of Eudes de Sully or Pierre de Nemours, late twelfth century. Gold and garnet; diameter 2.1 cm, height of bezel 2.5 cm. Apparently found 1858, in a grave in Notre Dame cathedral. Gift 1893 of Edouard Corroyer. Paris, Louvre Museum, OA 3357. Photos © GrandPalaisRmn (Musée du Louvre) / Stéphane Maréchalle. Reproduced courtesy of the Réunion des Musées nationaux.

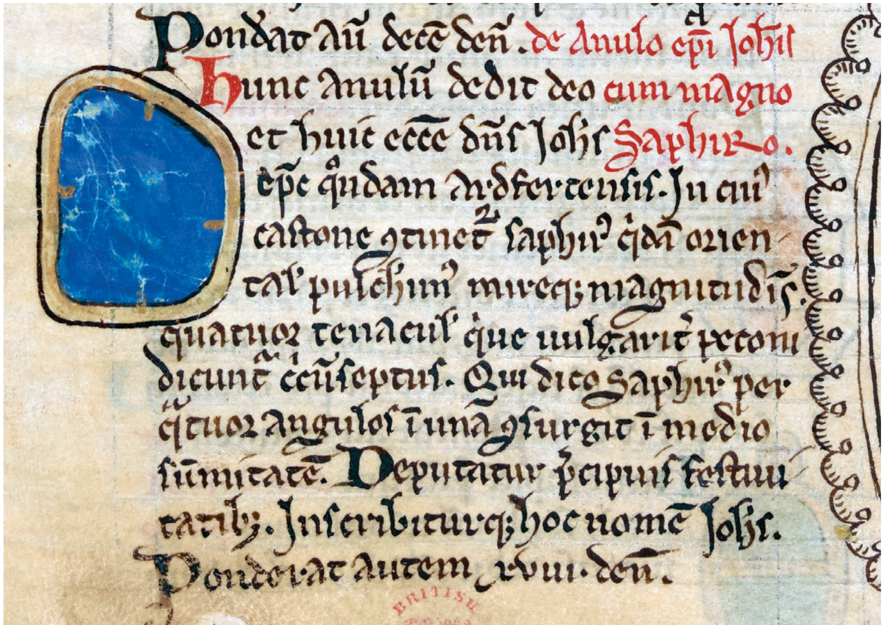

Figure 6.3. Matthew Paris, ring of "Bishop John" in the treasury of St. Albans. Detail from *Liber additamentorum*, London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D.I, fol. 146v. © British Library Board, reproduced with permission.

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belonged to Eudes de Sully (1197–1208, no relation to the more well-known Maurice de Sully) or Pierre de Nemours (1208–1219).[84] Despite the uncertain attribution, the Parisian context nonetheless helps to outline the ring's meaning.[85]

The Louvre ring and Aribo's have little in common but their materials: gold and semi-precious stones. Both fit within the very vague descriptions offered by Honorius and Rupert. Yet whereas the bezel of Aribo's ring is comparatively small, 1.4 cm at its widest, that of the Paris ring is massive, 2.5 by 2.1 cm, enough to hide the hoop (2.1 cm in internal diameter) and the finger when worn. This large bezel consists of a single, flat, polished garnet stone, edged by an even, thin band of gold and possessing neither letter nor image.[86] Seen from the top, it resembles some of the contemporary episcopal rings illustrated in Matthew Paris' account of the treasury of St. Alban's, like that of "Bishop John" with its large, irregularly-shaped sapphire (Figure 6.3 here).[87] Seen at a distance, the ring is impressive and legible in its simplicity. The fine ornamentation of the hoop (Figure 6.2b), the unfurling leaves reaching up tangentially to support the sides of the bezel, and the bird-like creature outlined in niello on its underside, all were invisible to the public and even to most who interacted with the vested bishop. These details may have served for his own private pleasure, or impressed with their refinement those clerics who surrounded the bishop in his official acts, perhaps holding or handling the ring in the liturgy of vesting.[88] During the liturgy, however, or in other occasions when

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lost in a theft in 1860, and apparently bought on the London art market by Édouart Corroyer, a student of Viollet-le-Duc; Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau."

84 Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 271. It is also possible that the ring was used for the burial of a later bishop; unfortunately, other goods from this grave seem not to have survived. Yet, as with Aribo's ring, the material value of the gold speaks against the idea of a designated burial object (unlike the wooden crozier), and for the idea that this ring belonged to the bishop buried there.

85 For Eudes and Pierre and their relationship to the cathedral liturgy, see Nemarich, "*Organistae* and the Cultivation of Polyphony."

86 It is sometimes said that text was prohibited on late-medieval rings, but Elżbieta Dąbrowska-Zawadzka has conclusively shown that this prohibition dates to the sixteenth century. For this fascinating cautionary tale, see Dąbrowska-Zawadzka, "La tombe de l'évêque A," 256.

87 London, British Library, Cotton MS Nero D.I, fol. 146v; an observation made by Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 272.

88 This ring is small enough (at 2.1 cm in diameter) to have been worn over the bare hand; it may have been used as a consecration ring, and was likely worn by the

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a larger public could see the bishop from a distance, the ring functioned, first and foremost, as a visible and obvious ring, almost akin to stage jewellery. So, if Aribo's ring was a sign of a *signaculum*, the Paris find was a sign of a ring.

Signum tantum

For thirteenth century Parisian bishops, then, a bishop's ring no longer served a sealing function, nor did it resemble seals or seal rings. Rather, a ring like the one found in Notre Dame looked like … a ring. What remained of the seal metaphor was the language of the sign in the liturgical formulas: the words *signum*, *signaculum*, and *signare*. These words, spoken over signet rings, had once evoked rich metaphors of guarding, closing (and opening), and authenticating. As these gestures came to be performed with independent matrices, however, the words had lost their once precise meaning.

Returning to the *signaculum fidei* prayer, it is possible to see how the ring could now be understood as a "sign of faith" rather than "a seal of faith:" the ring adorns or designates the bishop in an outward form of inner ornament, matching the "pure faith" with which he should truly be adorned (*ornatus*). For the bishop, it should act as a reminder of his duties (during and beyond liturgical performance), and for others, as a marker of his particular authority. The ring is no longer an object acting in the physical world but a visible stand-in for invisible realities: unction, the office of bishop, faith.

This relationship between the visible and the invisible came under new scrutiny in a time of growing intellectual concern with the theory of signs, including the special kind of signs called sacraments. In pre-scholastic and scholastic writing, the word *signum* was again of great importance, as an abstract term for those peculiar relationships of the intellect which link one thing with another thing as signified and signifier.[89] William of Auvergne was one of many writers in this period puzzling over signs and how they worked. For him, the word *signum* primarily related to those more abstract questions, with seals (*sigilla*) as one of many possible concrete phenomena serving in that function.

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bishop acting officially outside the liturgy. During pontifical liturgy, the bishop would by this time certainly have worn larger rings over gloves, then removed both for the eucharistic consecration.

89 Rosier-Catach, *La parole efficace*, 23–31; or see a broader view in Broadie, *Introduction to Medieval Logic*.

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In this context, it is perhaps worth reflecting on William's own ring use, as far as it is known. Like Maurice de Sully in the previous century, he was buried in Saint-Victor, probably wearing a ring.[90] But he left another, pontifical ring to Notre-Dame upon his death, as part of a splendid "chapel" or full set of ornaments for a service. The cathedral's obituary lists "a chasuble, a dalmatic and a tunicella, and two decorated albs (of which one is wholly silk), a stole, a mitre, a maniple, a crozier and a ring,"[91] All of these objects, which together amounted to a full costume for pontifical ceremonies, had their own metaphorical meanings according to prayers and commentaries.[92] William was very concerned about the moral and religious fibre of his clergy, and like the polemicists before him he certainly cared to see these meanings correspond to the virtuous character of the (future) wearer.[93]

The donation nonetheless reminds us that William, following contemporary practice, considered the individual item—whether ring or chasuble—to be interchangeable. While he likely had some impact on the design of the items he donated, the ring was inevitably among the many that a bishop might wear over his time in office. Unlike the rings found in graves, the one in his chapel remained in the possession of the cathedral, associated with a specific altar and used for particular occasions. Whereas signet rings and, perhaps, consecration rings, had a personal relationship to their wearer, a pontifical ring like this one designated a function, the bishop of Paris. Yet though this ring had little in common with the matrices worn by earlier bishops, it remained a *signaculum fidei*.

90 Taburet-Delahaye, "À propos de l'anneau," 270–71.

91 Guérard, *Cartulaire de l'église Notre-Dame de Paris*, 4:38–39. Other items listed in the entry, including vessels for chrism, should probably not be understood as part of the *capella*.

92 See Miller, *Clothing the Clergy*, 51–95.

93 See Nemarich, "*Organistae* and the Cultivation of Polyphony," 134–36.

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Chapter 7

AUTHENTICATING THE RINGS OF THE "NINE HOLY BISHOPS"

SANTO ESTEVO DE RIBAS DE SIL, FROM MODERN TO MEDIEVAL CONTEXTS

THERESE MARTIN

Dedicated to Luis Manuel Cuña Ramos, archivist extraordinaire

TUCKED AWAY IN the hilly green countryside of the Ribeira Sacra in northwestern Spain, the once powerful monastery of Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil (Ourense Province) has been renovated in recent decades for use since 2004 as a "parador." This national hotel system was set up in the 1960s to recuperate grand monuments fallen into disuse, especially castles and monasteries, thus encouraging tourism to sites now beyond the beaten track of the modern-day tourist. Yet Santo Estevo, perched in high isolation above the River Sil, had in prior times been a thriving pilgrimage centre. It is to the ongoing restoration of the church's furnishings that we owe the 2020 redis-

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covery of the "miracle-working" rings, associated with the nine bishops who were buried at Santo Estevo in the tenth century.

The present study traces the bishops' rings back through time, centring on both written and material evidence for key moments in their long lives, starting with their scholarly analysis in 2020–2022, reaching back to their heyday in the early modern period as relics of the splendid past, back further to the monastic institution's medieval commemoration of its episcopal founders, until arriving at the tenth-century context of bishops like those who retired to Santo Estevo, leaving their episcopal rings behind. Representing a thousand years in the history of a monastery, such rings are themselves as much manifestations of memory as historical documents. Looking back across a millennium allows me to cast a critical eye on textual sources and comparative examples that together help to test their authenticity, clarify their connection with the "nine holy bishops," and situate the rings of Santo Estevo within the context of medieval Iberian bishops' rings. The "authenticity" of holy objects was a matter of great importance in the Middle Ages, when contact with saintly remains created a tangible link to the unseen beyond. In the twenty-first century, a kindred need for authenticity inspires today's tourists; it seems that living in an era of fake news drives a yearning for what is perceived to be the more genuine past. This chapter's title also gives a nod to the "authentics" found with the rings; that is, diminutive parchment or textile labels accompanying relics that name the otherwise anonymous bones or other holy fragments of the saintly past.[1] A pair of authentics from Santo Estevo that date to the early modern period are among the written and material documents, laid out at the end of this chapter in Table 7.1, of the steps taken by the monastery to authenticate their saintly past. Throughout this chapter, I track the footprints left by such steps in order to reveal the evolving place of bishops' rings in the telling of the past and to perceive its echo in the present.

The Discovery of the Rings

In late 2020, a remarkable discovery was made during the continuing restoration of the furnishings and wall paintings in the presbytery of the monastic church of St. Stephen—now called Santo Estevo, in the Galician language

1 On authentics and medieval strategies of authentication, see Zchomelidse, "Liminal Phenomena," 256, who states that these labels, used since the early Middle Ages, were called "authentics" starting in the fifteenth century; Luyster, "Reassembling Textile Networks," 1054–55, fig. 5, for a twelfth-century example of a tiny textile bundle labelled with a saint's name.

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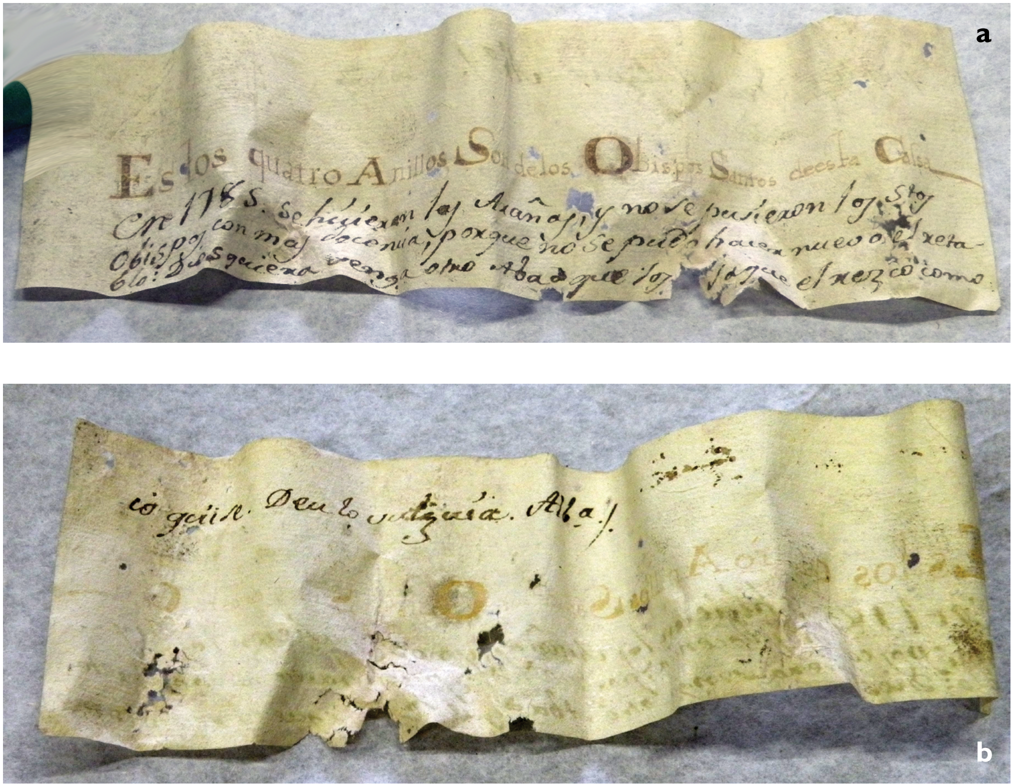

Figure 7.1. Paper authentic, found with rings at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. Ourense, Catedral de Ourense (Galicia). Photographs by author.

of northwestern Spain.[2] A polychromed wooden reliquary mounted in a relic cabinet high on the wall was found to contain bones, identified as belonging to four of the nine bishops who had retired to the monastery over the course of the tenth century. These saintly remains had been presumed to have been removed during the nineteenth-century exclaustration of the now-parish church. Even more surprising was the appearance among the bones of a small silk bag, embroidered with metallic threads, holding four silver rings, coinciding with the longstanding tradition that the relics of four bishops had been preserved to one side of the high altar and five to the other (when the

2 Vania López carried out the restoration at the Centro San Martín de la Diócesis de Ourense under the direction of the Xunta de Galicia. I am grateful for her expert collaboration with the Treasury Project. On the prior restoration of the monastic buildings and their conversion to a "parador," see Cupeiro López, "Intervenciones y usos."

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latter cabinet was opened, it was found empty).[3] Along with the rings, the delicate drawstring bag held two small documents authenticating the rings as relics: one on paper, which includes the date 1785, and an earlier one on parchment in script that corresponds to seventeenth-century paleography. The paper authentic was written in two different moments by very distinct hands (Figures 7.1a–b).

Written in brown ink, centred down the length of the paper, in a deliberately clear and presentational hand (i.e., with capital letters inked in), probably late seventeenth to early eighteenth century: "Estos quatro Anillos Son de los Obispos Santos de esta Casa" (These four Rings Are from the Holy Bishops of this House) (Figure 7.1a). And added in cursive in a black-brown ink, filling the space below and continuing onto the back of the paper: "En 1785 se hicieron las Arañas y no se pusieron los S[an]tos / Obispos con mas decencia, porque no se pudo hacer nuevo el reta- / blo: Dios quiera venga otro Abad que los saque el rezo como / io quise. Deu lo vulguia. Alb_a %" ([front]: In 1785 the *arañas*[4] were made, and the Holy Bishops were not placed more decently because a new retable could not be made: may God grant that a new abbot may come who will make them available for prayer as [back] I had wanted. God willing. Alb_a %) (Figure 7.1b).

As for the older authentic, it was written in brown ink, in a neat but non-display seventeenth-century hand on a narrow strip of parchment that was folded and knotted to form a little pack within which the four rings had been snugly wrapped up. Perhaps they were once looped onto the long tail of the little document to keep them safe while making them visible (Figure 7.2).

> Estos quatro anillos son de los q[ue] quedaron de los nueve Santos Obispos. Son los q[ue] han quedado. Los demas desaparecieron. Por ellos se pasa agua para los enfermos y sanan mu[cho]s.
>
> These four rings are from those that were left by the nine Holy Bishops. They are the ones that have remained. The rest disappeared. Through them water is poured for the sick, and many are healed.

---

3 Even more surprising than the appearance of the rings themselves was that their presence had been predicted just a few months previously in a novel by María Oruña, *El bosque de los cuatro vientos* (Ediciones Destino, 2020). Much has been made of this fortuitously timed publication and the discovery of the rings in local and international press, including the BBC Reel, "The Legendary 'Miracle Rings' of Ourense" (www.youtube.com/watch?v=qPZ2dFFRjHU).

4 Probably large, multi-branched hanging chandeliers.

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Estos quatro anillos son delos q̄ queda-
ron delos nueue Santos Obispos.
han quedado. los demas desaparesçieron.
ellos se pasa agua para los enfermos

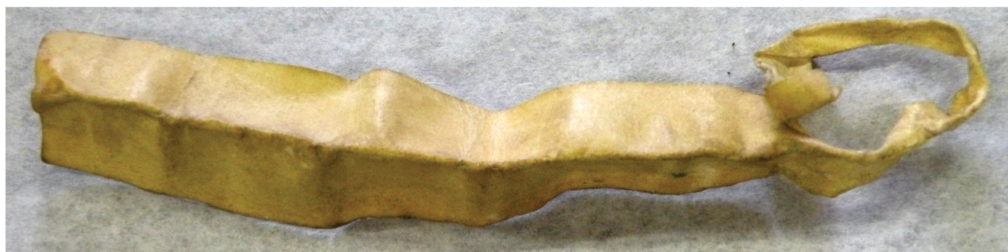

Figure 7.2. Parchment authentic, found with rings at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. Catedral de Ourense. Photographs by author.

Figure 7.3. Silk purse, embroidered with metal threads, found holding rings at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. Catedral de Ourense. Photograph by author.

Figure 7.4. Micro photo, metal threads embroidered into woven silk, purse found holding rings at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. Catedral de Ourense. Photograph by author.

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It is significant that this earlier parchment authentic speaks in the present tense, testifying to its writing during the active use of the rings. It also underscores the fact that these four were the only rings known in the monastery during the early modern period. For its part, the slightly later paper testimony refers only to the appropriate storage of the rings, not their use or miraculous nature, at a time when the church was updating its furnishings. Thus, both brief documents offer precious textual evidence for two distinct chapters in the life of the rings.

The drawstring purse in which they were found provides additional material evidence to help flesh out the story of the rings (Figure 7.3). The cream-coloured body of the pouch—silk, by its texture and sheen—is lined with a denser material to give it structure.[5] The exterior is embroidered in a simple pattern that recalls elongated leaves or feathers. These metal-wrapped threads give the purse both a decorative shine and a pleasingly weighty feel. Although the metal has a silvery glimmer, technical analysis revealed that these threads are made of copper (Figure 7.4).[6] The double braided (woollen?) cords of brown and tan, ending in tassels, were made to slide through the pleated and reinforced material at the opening; pulling them tight to cinch the purse would create the 42.5 cm long strings for wrapping around a belt or girdle so that the purse could be carried at the waist. A knot at the bottom of the bag holds its layers together, and the base is reinforced by a stitched arcading of metallic threads that echo the border along the folds of the opening. The circular form of this pouch is typical of purses used by both women and men from the late Middle Ages through the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries; comparable purses are held in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London.[7] The bag that guarded the rings of the bishops at Santo Estevo thus pertains to the same broad chronology as the older parchment authentic, adding an important layer to our knowledge about the active use of the rings in that period. The embroidered pouch may have been a gift to the monastic church, whether given as

5 The purse measures approximately 9.5 cm high by 10.5 cm wide. We chose not to stress the fabric by pulling the bag open for exact measurements, nor did we carry out any destructive sampling of the material.

6 I am grateful to Xosé-Lois Armada, who undertook the X-ray fluorescence testing on the bag and rings. The detailed technical analysis will be published in our forthcoming article.

7 My thanks go to Ana Cabrera for drawing my attention to these objects: see accession nos. 4062–1856 and T.246–1927 for French and English examples.

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Figure 7.5. Silver rings found at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. Catedral de Ourense. Photographs by author.

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an appropriate holder for the treasured rings or repurposed for that function when the rings were carried to the homes of the sick.

Turning to the material evidence of the four rings themselves, for all their reputation as miracle-working relics of saintly bishops, their appearance may strike a contemporary eye as less than impressive (Figures 7.5). They bear simple round or oval cabochon-cut stones (from top to bottom, left to right): (1) an unidentified whitish stone with damaged but seemingly deliberate (now illegible) incised marks down its length, perhaps an Arabic inscription, or a simple standing figure?[8] (stone 18 × 12 mm, channelled hoop inner diameter 23 mm); (2) a bare bezel from which the stone has been lost (bezel 17 mm, hoop inner diameter 20 mm); (3) white glass paste, indicated by the characteristic surface pitting ("stone" 18 mm, hoop inner diameter 27 mm); (4) a tiny turquoise (stone 5 mm, hoop inner diameter 23 mm). Three rings are constructed by hoops soldered to bezels of differing shapes which bear the stones; the fourth is a complete circle whose upper part has been widened to accommodate a plain setting for the diminutive round turquoise. All four hoops and settings are of silver; the most elaborate one has been decorated with the addition of gold, using the mercury amalgam method, in the channels of the hoop, on the bezel, and across the stone itself (ring 1, upper left; Figures 7.6); such channelling closely parallels a ring at the British Museum dated fifth to seventh century.[9] The hoop of the ring that has lost its stone is decorated with diminutive black crosses and dots in niello (ring 2, lower left, see Figure 7.5a). With hoops ranging in diameter from 20 to 27 mm, these rings could have been worn on a bare finger or over an episcopal glove (one of the massive "papal" type rings, typical of the fifteenth century, has a hoop diameter of just 19 mm),[10] whether in the standard ring-position of today, on finger or thumb, or even between the first and second knuckle, as seen on medieval tomb figures and in early modern paintings.

In sum, these rings are made of the noble metal of silver, decorated with gold or niello and set with precious stones or once-glossy glass paste; if they appear modest in comparison with other surviving rings associated with

8 For comparisons, see many examples in Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*; Porter, *Arabic and Persian Seals*.

9 British Museum, inv. no. AF.291. Another example of a channelled hoop from this same period in Visigothic Iberia is Museo Arqueológico Nacional, inv. no. 1955/51/1160, a bronze ring set with a small round cabochon of reddish glass, found in a woman's burial.

10 Hindman et al., *Toward an Art History of Medieval Rings*, 174–77, 231, no. 29.

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Figure 7.6. Silver ring embellished with gold, full view and micro photo detail, found at Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil. Catedral de Ourense. Photographs by author.

medieval bishops, perhaps a thorough cleaning by restoration experts might do much to change our perception of their value. The very simplicity of these four rings complicates a search for their origins, as none is inscribed with words or images that might help to narrow down the chronology or culture of origin. However, perhaps we put too much faith in inscriptions to provide all the answers. For example, the incised name on a silver bishop's ring excavated in Cordoba—SAMSON EPSCPS* in an oval of jet—gives epigraphic evidence only of an early medieval date, ranging from the sixth-century Visigothic era to the ninth- or tenth-century stratigraphy of its find. Although its reversed lettering does testify to the ring's design for use as a signet, this particular Bishop Samson has not been identified in the textual sources.[11]

Indeed, these four rings are hardly the splendid adornments we might imagine in the possession of a powerful medieval prelate, such as the rings associated with St. Rudesindus or Rosendo (907–977), who had been bishop of Mondoñedo and Dumio ca. 923–942 until his own retirement to the important monastery of Celanova, founded under the auspices of Rosendo and his family, especially through the rich donation of 938 by his mother Ilduara Eriz (d. 958).[12] Rosendo was both a contemporary and a Galician neighbour of

11 Museo Arqueológico y Etnológico de Córdoba, inv. no. DJ031895. See Moreno and González, "Dos tumbas hispanovisigodas," fig. 6a; Baena Alcántara, "Anillo del obispo Samson," 158, cat. no. 86. For a theological-scholastic understanding of bishops' signet rings, see Chapter 6 in this volume.

12 Donation transcribed by Díaz y Díaz, Pardo Gómez, and Vilariño Pinto, in *Ordoño de Celanova*, 241–46. See also Pallares, *Ilduara*; Bowman, "Record, Chronicle and Oblivion."

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Figure 7.7. Gold ring set with ancient carnelian intaglio from the monastery of Celanova, associated with St. Rosendo. Ourense, Museo Catedralicio de Ourense. Photographs by author.

the bishops who retired to the monastery at Ribas de Sil over the course of the tenth century, and "his" rings were preserved in the monastic treasury at Celanova, together with other objects associated with Rosendo since his *Vita et miracvli* were written two centuries later.[13] The vita tells us that Rosendo's ring "had been taken from his finger at the time of his translation,"[14] that is, in the late twelfth century when the remains of the former bishop were moved from his original tenth-century burial and placed in the monumental tomb that could be visited by those who sought healing. There is no description of the material or appearance of the ring ("annulus") that effected two cures through direct touch to a suffering young woman's swollen face or in the clenched and twisted fingers of a cleric,[15] although we are told that it was kept in a small silver receptacle ("capsula argentea"). Curiously, this pair of healings are the only ones said to have been done through the aegis of a ring; the vast majority of Rosendo's miracles occurred when pilgrims besought the physical presence of the saint by grasping his monumental stone tomb.

Today, three rings associated with St. Rosendo, which served as talismanic objects and as manifestations of the saint's memory at Celanova, are held by the

13 *Ordoño de Celanova*, ed. Díaz y Díaz et al.

14 *Ordoño de Celanova*, ed. Díaz y Díaz et al, 216–17: "annulus, qui in eius translatione ab ipsius digito receptus fuerat."

15 On touch, see Chapter 1 in this volume.

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Figure 7.8. Rock crystal rings from the monastery of Celanova, associated with St. Rosendo. Museo Catedralicio de Ourense. Photographs by author.

Cathedral of Ourense.[16] First among them is a magnificent gold ring densely ornamented with filigree and granulations, boasting clusters of gold globules soldered in place, interwoven with circlets of gold wires in a bravura display of craftsmanship (Figure 7.7). It bears a carnelian intaglio of Greco-Roman origin displaying the engraving of a seated and helmeted male figure holding a lance (Jupiter?).[17] Also associated with Rosendo are a pair of rings set with massive oval rock crystal cabochons; the larger measures a whopping 40 × 32 mm, and the smaller is 34 × 24 mm (Figure 7.8; compare to the 5 mm round turquoise in Fig. 7.5a above).[18] Of unusual clarity, the larger of the rock crystals rises to a soft peak along its length and has been set on an open bezel, thus acting as a distorting magnifying glass for the glove on which it would have been worn.

Of course, it is unlikely that any of these three rings could actually have been used by Rosendo. The gold one has been dated to the eleventh or twelfth century through the style of the filigree and granulations, the shape of the broad plano-convex section hoop narrowing to the back, and presumably for the reuse of an ancient gem in a magnificent setting that is most typical of the central Middle Ages.[19] As for the rock crystal rings from Celanova, both the larger one's silver hoop with shoulders in the form of miniature animal heads and the smaller's gilded setting—which appears to be made of a brass alloy rather than silver—with plain hoop and leaf-like decoration

16 During his 1572 travels, Morales, *Viage por orden del Rey,* recorded these three rings at Celanova, and he made note of just a few rings at other institutions, but not at Ribas de Sil; see note 31 below.

17 Pintos, "Anillo de San Rosendo," 258–59; measurements given as 3.3 × 3.2 cm. Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 265–66, states that "se ha datado en el siglo XI, pero podría ser romano." On the working of carnelian in the ancient world, see Lapatin, *Luxus*.

18 Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 265, with slightly different dimensions. On rock crystal in general, see Hahn and Shalem, eds., *Seeking Transparency*.

19 Kinney, "Ancient Gems"; Henig, "The Re-Use and Copying of Ancient Intaglios."

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around the solid bezel, speak to their creation at different moments long after Rosendo's death. Nevertheless, these rings' preservation at his monastery gives evidence of what Rosendo's monastic successors understood as appropriate for an important bishop.[20] My reading of the fitting appearance of Rosendo's rings should be kept in mind as we seek to decipher the more modest form of the rings from Ribas de Sil. Might Rosendo's well-known medieval vita and his miracle-working ring have inspired the telling of similar tales in the seventeenth century at the nearby monastery of Santo Estevo, at a time long after the memorial tombs of their own bishops had been demolished in favour of a more modern display of sainthood?

To answer this question, we must turn from the physical evidence read in the rings themselves to their textual presence in the Galician monastery. Emilio Duro Peña, the learned canon and archivist of Ourense Cathedral who wrote the essential history of the monastery of Santo Estevo, clarifies why their historical record is so difficult to reconstruct: most documentation from the first three centuries of the monastery's existence has been lost to flame.[21] Let us then follow the trail back from that 2020 discovery of the rings to what we can discern of them in the monastery's history, starting now with the high point of the seventeenth century and moving back further and further in time until the evidence runs out. At that point, we will be left to weigh it up and determine whether the rings we see today could have belonged to nine holy bishops in the tenth century.

The Early Modern Monastic History of Ribas de Sil

It was in the seventeenth century that the rings featured with greatest prominence in the written record, especially in 1662 when the monastery sought to have their sainted bishops recognized officially, providing testimony of the miraculous cures wrought through their intercession. A judge

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20 For other bishop's rings from eleventh- and twelfth-century Iberia, see Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 268–70; Castiñeiras, "San Martiño de Mondoñedo," 1235–61, esp. 1260, for discussion and illustration of the bishop's ring and staff preserved at San Martiño. Found in the tomb of Bishop Gonzalo of Mondoñedo (1070–1108), the gold ring bears "una pieza de cuarzo traslúcido sujeto por cuatro pequeñas cabezas de ave, cuyos ojos poseen incrustaciones de esmalte. En uno de los lados aparece grabada, con incrustaciones de esmalte, la inquietante inscripción: NOLO ESSE DATVS NEQUE VENUM DATUS ('No quiere ser dado ni vendido)." Castiñeiras connects the phrase to the bishop's fight against simony and in favour of his small bishopric against the more powerful see of Santiago de Compostela.

21 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*.

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and notary were sent to Santo Estevo to examine the relics, and they opened the reliquary cabinets on the north and south walls of the main apse, reporting the existence of long bones wrapped in cloths, knotted textiles, and a "very old silver pyx" ("muy antigua custodia de plata"), as well as ancient silver bells (none of these artifacts has been preserved).[22] Testimony was given by three priests, eight lay men, and four lay women of the parishes pertaining to Santo Estevo concerning the miracles worked by the rings "that they say had belonged to the holy bishops" ("que dicen haber sido de los santos obispos") and that were kept in "a little box that was in the silver chest" ("una caxilla que estaba en el caxón de la plata"). The witnesses reported that the rings were taken to the sick, who put them on, touched them, or washed with water poured through them, and thus they were cured. Among those healed were a girl born blind in 1594, a man with a goiter, and a young woman with a dangerous fever. However, the evidence was deemed insufficient, and in 1670 the case toward canonization was closed. Yet the lack of official approval did not diminish the local cult, according to Duro Peña, who notes that the bishops' reputation for sanctity continued without interruption until the exclaustration of the 1830s, at which point he wonders, "what was done with the rings? Possibly the monks took them with them, as they were theirs."[23]

Despite the ultimate rejection of official recognition for their holy bishops, the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the heyday of Santo Estevo. From the archival evidence of the monastery's bid to promote their holy bishops, it is clear that before the official acts of 1662 these rings had already been removed from the saintly bones. The rings were likely being taken to the sick in the embroidered purse in which they would eventually be found in 2020, together with their authentics; as we have seen, the little pouch and parchment authentic can be dated to approximately that same period. But if the rings had originally been buried with their individual owners, how did four of them come to be stored together in this drawstring bag? To answer this question, we must move further back in the history of the monastery, tracing the changes in the church's furnishings that were documented at the end of the sixteenth century, along with their descriptions by visitors to Santo Estevo over the course of the following century.

22 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*, 30–32, citing Archivo Catedralicio de Ourense, Papeles de San Esteban, 1662, April 29, May 1, May 5–7.

23 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*, 32: "Por cierto, ¿qué se ha hecho de los anillos? Posiblemente los llevaron los monjes, pues eran suyos." On the exclaustration in general, see Rueda Hernanz, *La desamortización en España.*

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In 1593–1594 Abbot Víctor of Nájera commissioned the sculptor Juan de Angés to make a new retable, followed by a pair of repositories for the bishops' relics to be located on the presbytery's north and south walls.[24] These were designed to display the relics in a more visible location and underline their nine-fold saintliness in the form of two oak reliquary cabinets with gilded iron grills and doors that locked. The interior divisions made room for five bishops in one cabinet and four in the other. The new set-up was witnessed less than three decades later in 1621 by Antonio de Yepes, chronicler of the Benedictine Order in Spain, who explains the reason for moving the relics from their previous location:

> seeing that the holy bodies of the bishops, although they were in an elevated position, were not adorned as nobly as they deserved, each one was placed in a shrine, five to one side of the high altar and four to the other, very well worked, where now they are seen and enjoyed and praised for the good will and the devotion to the bones of the saints, as incorrupt and as healthy as if no time at all had passed.[25]

That "elevated position" from which they were removed was the interior of the retable behind the high altar itself, within which they had been installed in 1463 during an earlier updating of the furnishings of the old church. Thus, prior to having been separated into two sets of four and five bishops, 1463 was the moment when the bones of all nine had been brought together from their earlier individual tombs. Might that move also have responded to a particularly poor moment in the history of the monastery, when it was in need of a way to publicize its set of saints and encourage pilgrimage? In the early and central Middle Ages, the community had grown from some eight monks to twenty, but with the plague in the mid fourteenth century that number began to reduce until there were just six monks left in the second half of the fifteenth century, when the bishops' relics were gathered together and elevated to the retable behind the high altar. Their situation improved after 1506 when Santo Estevo joined the Benedictine Congregation of Valladolid, and by the late sixteenth century the number of monks had grown to forty, ushering in the monastery's

24 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*, 30, 92.

25 Yepes, *Coronica general*, 7, fols. 323v–324r: "viendo que los santos cuerpos de los obispos, si bien estaban elevados, no se veían con el adorno y grandeza que merecían, colocó a cada uno en su arca, poniendo al lado del altar mayor cinco a una parte y cuatro a otra, muy bien labradas, donde ahora se ven y se gozan y loan el buen ánimo y devoción de los huesos de sus santos tan incorrumptos [sic] y tan sanos como si no hubiese pasado tiempo por ellos."

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period of greatest splendour and leading to the aforementioned bid for official recognition of its nine saintly bishops.[26]

As we shall see below, no mention was made of the rings' existence until the mid-sixteenth century, perhaps because it was simply taken for granted that all bishops have a ring of office.[27] Nor did the individual identities of the nine matter as much as their collective sanctity.[28] It was Ansuri, the first of the bishops to retire to Santo Estevo, who was singled out by Juan Tamayo Salazar in the middle of the seventeenth century as still having had rings "sticking to" ("haerentes") his fingers when his bones were placed together with those of his saintly colleagues in the retable behind the high altar in 1463:

> And the bones, mixed together and enclosed in one shrine, were placed behind the high altar of that church, where even now they are kept … The fingers of Saint Ansuri were found with precious rings still sticking to them, with which even today many cures are effected, both by the virtue of the stones inserted in them and especially by their own holy merits.[29]

Tamayo's seventeenth-century reference to the healing power of Ansuri's rings was a new addition to the chain of written sources, perhaps testifying to their removal from the rest of the relics for use among those who sought the saints' touch. Ambrosio de Morales, in the course of his 1572 visits to relic collections across Spain, had not made note of any rings at Santo Estevo, although he did sum up the translation of the bishops' relics to the retable:

> This house has an ancient holiness because it has the bodies of the nine bishops which are locally understood to be saints. They were in high stone

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26 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*, 29 and 137–38; Valle Pérez, "Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil," 893–94, 904.

27 Méhu, "L'ordination de l'évêque."

28 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*, 28–29, seeks to clarify what can be known about their names, dates, and dioceses: they were Asuri/Ansurio of Ourense (909–922); Vimarasio/Vimara (937–942) and Viliulfo (952–988) of Tuy; Gonzalo Osorio (ca. 915–922) and Froarengo (905–918) of Coimbra; Servando (diocese unknown); Pelayo (in the tenth century there were bishops of this name at Lugo, Coimbra, and Santiago); Alfonso (diocese unknown); and Pedro (of Braga?). For a slightly different list and extensive prior bibliography on these bishops, see Carrero, "Paraliturgia, ajuar hagiográfico," 13.

29 Tamayo Salazar, *Anamnesis sive Commemoratio*, 1:305–8, January 25, SS. Ansurius et Socii: "atque ossa commixta, una in arca inclusa, post maius altare illius eclesiae reposuit, ubi etiam nunc adservantur. … Reperit idem digitis SS. Antistitum haerentes pretiosos annulos, quibus multae etiam hodie fiunt curationes, tum insertorum lapidum virtute, tum praecipue ipsorum sanctorum meritis." On stones of virtue, see Buettner, *The Mineral and the Visual*, and Chapter 3 in this volume.

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> tombs, all with epitaphs, throughout the whole cloister, but a solemn elevation was carried out, placing them in a rich retable that was made for the high altar, with nine well adorned compartments, and the stone of their tombs was used for rebuilding without saving any of the epitaphs except one [that of Ansuri …] This monastery has been burned twice, and relics, books, and documents were consumed in the flames.[30]

Morales's lack of reference to the rings at Santo Estevo is curious, both because he did make note of rings at three other locations[31] and because just two decades earlier Juan de Molina had written about the same movement of the saints from their stone tombs to the new location within the retable, providing the oldest reference I have found to the bishops' rings. Molina gets the number of saints wrong, but his substitution of seven for nine reinforces our understanding of their holiness augmented by accumulation, with a symbolically significant number:

> In the monastery of Santistevan de Ribas de Sil … are the seven holy bodies who were all bishops of well-known churches and some forty years ago a reformer came there, who did not appreciate the excellent memory and authority of their tombs and he destroyed them all. They had been separate, but, gathering together the bones of one and all within a single shrine, he put them behind the high altar, where they are now, and on the fingers of those blessed bodies he found very rich rings, in which now is found great virtue, which comes as much from the stones as from their owners.[32]

30 Morales, *Viage por orden del Rey*, 161–63, at 162: "Tiene esta Casa una santa antigüedad, por tener los Cuerpos de nueve Obispos que en la tierra son tenidos por Santos ... Estaban en tumbas altas de piedra, por todo el Claustro, y tenian sus Epitafios, mas hicieron elevación solemne de ellos, poniendolos encima de un retablo rico que han hecho en el Altar Mayor en nueve repartimientos bien adornados, y las tumbas de piedra gastaron en edificios sin sacar los Epitafios, mas que uno … Este Monesterio se ha quemado dos veces, y alli se consumieron Reliquias, Libros, y Escrituras."

31 Morales, *Viage por orden del Rey*: Santo Toribio de Liébana ("Dos Anillos del Santo," 59), the Cathedral of Ourense ("También está allí el anillo por donde se halló el Cuerpo Santo [of Eufemia]: es grande y de oro bajo con una gran piedra redonda y parece Amatista. No se puede ver bien por estar el anillo encerrado en una cagita de plata con redecica por donde se ve pendiente en una cadena de plata con que se lo ponen al cuello los enfermos, y se tiene con esto gran devoción," 149), and at Celanova, associated with Rosendo ("También están tres Anillos suyos, dos de plata dorados, con cristales grandes, y uno de oro con Corniola grabada," 154–55).

32 Molina, *Descripcion del Reyno de Galizia,* fol. 10r: "En el monesterio de Santistevan de Ribas de Sil … Están siete cuerpos sanctos que fueron todos obispos de yglesias bien conocidas … y aura [sic, hará] quarenta y tantos años que un reformador que alli vino, no preciandose de la excelente memoria y auctoridad de tales sepulchros, los deshizo todos siete, que apartados estavan, y juntando todos los huessos de los

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This phrase about their virtue would be copied by Tamayo a century later when he attributed all the rings to Ansuri, the first of the holy bishops to be buried at Santo Estevo and the only one whose medieval epitaph was preserved. It seems that the reforming abbot may thus have been the one who took at least some of the rings from the bishops' fingers, recognizing their "virtue," when their medieval tombs were destroyed.

Ribas de Sil and Medieval Construction

Like the multiple rings that came to be attributed to Ansuri in the early modern period, it is possible that rings had still been on the other episcopal owners' fingers before the remains of the nine bishops were removed from their previous individual stone tombs in the thirteenth-century cloister and placed within the retable behind the main altar, then moved again to the more visible location of the lateral reliquary cabinets. But those individual monumental tombs, designed to attract pilgrims to the monastery, had themselves been created two centuries after the bishops' decease: nothing is known of the original tenth-century burials. Augmented by reconstruction of both the monastic church and a splendid cloister with nine commemorative sepulchres in the decades around the turn of the thirteenth century, the joint fame of the holy bishops had been growing during the central Middle Ages. By the early thirteenth century, among the many donations and privileges granted to Santo Estevo by King Alfonso IX (r. 1188 –1230) is a grand concession in 1220 of privileges throughout his royal lands. Calling himself king of León and Galicia, Alfonso makes his gift to the monastery and to the "nine bodies of the holy bishops who are buried there, for whom God makes infinite miracles."[33] Scholarship has generally underscored that this early thirteenth-century donation is the first written testimony to the relics of nine saintly personages and their miracle-working capacity, but it must be emphasized that the reference is to their corporeal remains, not to any accessory relics, rings or otherwise.

unos y los otros en una arca, los puso de tras del altar mayor, donde agora estan, y en los dedos de los benditos cuerpos hallo muy ricos anillos, en los quales agora se halla mucha virtud que procede ansi de las piedras como de sus dueños." Available at http://biblioteca.galiciana.gal/es/consulta/registro.do?id=560555; the catalogue notes that Molina figures under other names than Juan, including Bartolomé Sagrario, Francisco, and Luis.

33 Duro Peña, *El monasterio de San Esteban*, 264, no. 20: "novem corporibus sanctis episcopis qui ibi sunt tumulata pro quibus Deus infinita miracula facit"; González, *Alfonso IX*, 2, no. 386.

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The institution's written history had begun some three centuries earlier during a previous period of reformation of local monastic traditions in accordance with transnational currents, in which private monasteries and hermitages were brought under ruling hierarchies and into line with regular monasticism. Santo Estevo had initially been formed by King Ordoño II of Galicia (r. 910–914) and Astur-León (r. 914–924), who donated lands to Abbot Franquila in 921 to create a monastery for the community of hermits who were living under his charge in the area. The monastery and its royal sponsorship proved attractive to a number of bishops, who sought retirement and burial there over the course of the tenth century.

Although most of the documentation of Santo Estevo from that period and its growth through the thirteenth century has been lost, its built environment allows us to continue tracing the medieval story of the saintly bishops and their presence at Ribas de Sil. The inscribed date of 1183 on a pier in the east end of the church locates the commencement of construction or its consecration date, confirming the stylistic evidence of the late Romanesque architecture and ornamentation.[34] The early thirteenth-century cloister, with its nine "high stone tombs, all with epitaphs, throughout the whole cloister," in the words of Morales, had been designed to monumentalize the saintly remains in a space removed from the hurly-burly of daily life yet made accessible to pilgrims seeking cures, similar to the monumentalization we saw above for St. Rosendo at the monastery of Celanova.[35]

But here the trail of direct evidence ends. So, if we have neither material nor written evidence for the tenth-century existence of the four extant rings of Santo Estevo, how can we continue to pursue the question of their authenticity? For this we must open out beyond Ribas de Sil to trace other bishop's rings in Iberia during the central Middle Ages. The rare surviving rings, together with ample documentary sources, allow our search to go on along a parallel trail.

34 Valle Pérez, "Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil," 903; Castiñeiras, "San Estevo de Ribas de Sil revisitado."

35 Castiñeiras, "San Estevo de Ribas de Sil revisitado," 58, understands the "high stone tombs" seen by Morales as the original tenth-century monuments. I think that they are more likely to have been created at the same time as the early thirteenth-century "Bishops' Cloister."

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The Rings in Comparative Context

The most extensive written documentation from medieval Iberia comes from the opposite extreme of the Peninsula, the region of Catalunya, which preserves many testaments and inventories that refer to rings, owned by individuals[36] or institutions.[37] These textual sources underline how relatively common the possession of rings would have been: as ornaments made of precious metals, they of course belonged to the elite, yet simple silver rings would not have been beyond the reach of many medieval women and men. In wills from the central Middle Ages, we read only the most succinct of descriptions, ones that document a ring's existence without giving any sense of its aspect or materiality beyond a reference to gold, silver, and sometimes the stones. Lourdes Sanjosé i Llongueras has gathered multiple tenth-century examples of gifts from elite men and women to churches, such as in 917, from Count Gausbert for the consecration of the Cathedral of Santa Eulalia: "a superb gold ring with its precious stones" ("anulum aureum optimum cum suis preciosis lapidibus").[38] The 1068 testament of the noblewoman Arsenda de Fluvià, wife of Arnau Mir de Tost, includes golden rings with gemstones ("anulos de auro cum iemas et gegonciis").[39] Such rings—also discussed in this volume by Mariah Proctor-Tiffany and Inés Calderón—whether sold, passed down in wills to family and friends, or donated to favourite churches, rarely survive. Their most likely fate was to be melted down with other metalworks for conversion to new (or renovated) secular ornaments or liturgical objects, or indeed for many other economic ends, such as the financing of church construction. Joan Duran-Porta offers the example of Pere, a canon from the Cathedral of Vic, who in 1148 left twenty-two gold coins and six rings with precious stones for the restoration and embellishment ("restaurandam et augendam") of the cross on his institution's main altar.[40]

36 Duran-Porta, "Relinquo ad ipsa tabula."

37 Sanjosé i Llongueras, *Esments d'orfebreria*, 23–33, 45–46.

38 Sanjosé i Llongueras, *Esments d'orfebreria*, 63, doc. 10.

39 Duran-Porta, "Relinquo ad ipsa tabula," 122; cit. Chesé, *Col·lecció diplomàtica*, 1:326–31, doc. 87. On Arsenda, see recently Abenza Soria, "Arnau Mir de Tost y Arsenda de Fluvià."

40 Duran-Porta, "Relinquo ad ipsa tabula," 125; citing Llop, *Col·lecció diplomàtica*, 1:437–39, doc. 449.

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And what of the aforementioned testimony to the finding of multiple rings on the fingers of one of our Galician bishops? Here again the Catalan wills document the parallel possession of more than just a single "episcopal" ring, such as those of Bishop Eriball of Urgell, who in 1040 left his five rings to the heads of five different Catalan dioceses. He distinguishes his rings by the nobleman from whom he had received it, or by the colour of the stone, or both ("another ring, which belong to Arnau Mir [de Tost…]" "another ring, with a white stone, which belonged to Count Ermengaud," or "another ring, with a man's head in signet").[41] Interestingly, Eriball makes no mention of whether his rings were silver or gold.

For the metals of Iberian bishops' rings, we can turn to both hagiographic testimonies and the few surviving rings of the tenth through twelfth centuries; most are said to have been found in the bishops' tombs when many were opened in the early modern period.[42] The best comparison for our nine Galician bishops is Atilano, Bishop of Zamora, whose life was written ca. 910–920 together with that of his companion Froilán.[43] They were monastic founders whose fame led to each being named bishop in the year 900 by the Astur-Leonese king Alfonso III (r. 866–910), Froilán in the diocese of León and Atilano as the first bishop of Zamora. His confirmation in various charters attests to Atilano's activities at the royal court in León or travelling with rulers to Galicia from 907 until 919, the probable year of his death. The central chapter of Atilano's saintly story has him throwing his episcopal ring into a river as he begins a penitential pilgrimage, saying to it, "[w]hen I see you again, I will know for certain that all

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41 Fité Llevot, "Arte y poder," 198, citing Villanueva, *Viage literario*, 10: appendix 34, 330: "Annulum quidem, qui fuit comitis Ermengaudi, iussit dare episcopo suo successore, ut remuneret orationi…eius, vel comtitis Ermengaudi. Annulus autem, qui fuit Arnalli Mironis [de Tost], iussit dare Olivae episcopo sedis Ausonensis. Annulum namque cum petra alba, qui fuit comitis Ermengaudi, dimissit episcopo Gerundae. (Annulus) habens petram rubeam, episcopo Barchinonensi. Annulus insuper, in quo est capud hominis signatum, episcopo Ripacurcensi." See also Duran-Porta, "Relinquo ad ipsa tabula," 122; cit. Llop, *Col·lecció diplomàtica*, 1:181–85, doc. 160.

42 On the finding of bishops' rings in their tombs, see overall the catalogue in Sanke, *Die Gräber geistlicher Eliten*; for Spain, Carrero, "Paraliturgia, ajuar hagiográfico"; for France, Meunier, "Bague dite de Maurice de Sully"; and Dervieu, "La bague au Moyen Âge," 67, 73–77; for England, Oman, *Victoria and Albert*, 30–31; for Italy (a twelfth-century "silver bishop's ring from Murano"), Taylor and Scarisbrick, *Finger Rings*, 58–59, no. 429.

43 Martín Iglesias, "La Vita Froilanis"; García, "Atilano de Zamora"; Luis Corral, "En busca de hombres santos."

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my sins have been forgiven."[44] Returning to Zamora after two years and a series of tribulations, Atilano, dressed in rags, finds himself in a refuge for pilgrims and the poor outside the city. Upon gutting the fish to be served at the beggars' table, Atilano discovered his very ring and knew that God had forgiven him.[45] At that moment, all the bells in the city began to peal, and the townspeople streamed out to receive their erstwhile bishop, suddenly magnificently dressed in glorious vestments, his episcopal ring restored to his hand, and they returned him in procession to his rightful place at the episcopal palace.

Atilano's ring was described in 1621 by the Benedictine chronicler Yepes:

> Beyond the body of this saintly prelate, preserved by the Zamorans, they hold in great esteem his precious objects, which help them to keep his memory fresh: in the church of San Pedro, which is now called of San Ildefonso, is kept the ring that Saint Atilano threw into the Duero and that was later found in the belly of the fish. The ring is very slim, and it must be no more than one *real* of silver in weight (how humble were the bishops at that time!), and set within it is a turquoise stone, somewhat larger than a chickpea. The Zamorans also preserve a bone comb, which they say was used by Saint Atilano, and the staff on which he leaned, which is of wood, and even the basin in which the fish was cleaned.[46]

That original silver ring with its humble turquoise stone is now almost completely hidden from sight, encased in gold and topped by a deep blue cabochon, which appears to be glass paste intended to evoke sapphire, a sort of ring-shaped reliquary to protect and magnify the remains of Atilano's ring

44 Flórez, "Vita Sancti Attilani," 463–65, at 464: "Quando te revidero, omnium delictorum meorum veniae certus ero."

45 On the topos of a ring rediscovered in a fish, see Martínez Ángel, "Reflexiones sobre las culturas oral y escrita."

46 Yepes, *Coronica general*, 5, fol. 205r, "El anillo es muy delgado, y terna [tendrá] no mas que un real de plata de peso (que tan humildes eran los Obispos de aquel tiempo!) y está engastada en el una piedra Turquesa, algo mayor que un garbanço. Aliende del cuerpo que conservan los Zamoranos deste santo Prelado, tienen en mucha estima otras alhajas suyas, que les ayudan a refrescar su memoria: porque en la Iglesia de San Pedro, que ya se llama de San Ildefonso, se guarda el anillo que San Atilano arrojó en el Duero, y despues se halló en el buche del pez. Tambien guardan los Zamoranos un peyne de huesso, que dizen servia a San Atilano, y el baculo a que se arrimava, que es de palo, y hasta la pila en que se lavó el pez." Yepes expands on the brief 1596 testimony of Fray Atanasio de Lobera, *Historia de las grandezas*, fols. 409v–410r: "el anillo es tan delgado que me parece tendrá poco más de un real de plata. Está engastada en él una piedra turquesa, no muy fina, algo mayor que un garbanço."

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inside it (Figure 7.9).[47] The ring-reliquary, placed at the heart of a cross-shaped reliquary in the late sixteenth century by the silversmith Antonio Rodríguez de Carbajal, can be viewed in its magnificence today in the Zamoran parish church of San Pedro y San Ildefonso.[48] Set behind glass, the ring is impossible to access fully without dismantling part of the cross reliquary. However, it is clearly evident that a metal artifact, which appears to be of silver, has been carefully preserved within the splendidly displayed gold ring. In the early modern period, it seems that a simple silver circlet set with turquoise—just like one of the rings found at Ribas de Sil—was not considered adequate for the commemoration of a saintly bishop, even if it had been appropriate for him to wear in the tenth century. Yet it was indeed very appropriate to preserve and honour the holy relics, maintaining their memory and authority while contributing to the aura of authenticity through the splendour of the new setting.

Conclusion

Now that our journey back in time has concluded in Zamora with the remains of a tenth-century silver ring, encased within a golden framework at the crux of a sixteenth-century reliquary, can we make a scholarly pronouncement about the four silver rings that were so fortuitously found in 2020 at Santo Estevo? I confess that I began this study in a decidedly skeptical mindset, but the deeper I have dug through medieval and early modern written and material evidence, the more inclined I am to accept the authority of the parchment authentic found in the purse with them: "These four Rings Are from the Holy Bishops of this House." For the community at Santo Estevo, the rings were certainly authentic, whether as memory objects that

47 Rivera de las Heras, "Relicario del anillo," 254, describes Atilano's ring as being "made of silver, with a little filigree work" and he identifies the stone as a sapphire ("El cuadrón central, circular, alberga un anillo de oro – 24 × 21 mm – con un zafiro – 11 × 8 mm – engastado en un receptáculo oval decorado con un fino sogueado. El interior del aro envuelve parcialmente lo que parece ser otro anillo realizado en plata con pequeñas labores de filigrana"). See also Labarta, *Anillos de la península ibérica*, 267–68.

48 I am very grateful to D. Juan Carlos López Hernández, Episcopal Delegate to the Delegación Episcopal de Cultura, Patrimonio y Sociedad of Zamora, and to D. Juan Luis Martín Barrios, Dean of Zamora Cathedral and Pastor of the Church of San Pedro y San Ildefonso, who generously granted permission to study the relics of St. Atilano (ring, ivory comb, and remains of the wooden episcopal staff—the basin mentioned by Yepes is no longer extant). Thanks also go to my colleague Esperanza Alfonso for her kind assistance during on-site research.

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Figure 7.9. Reliquary of the ring of St. Atilano. Zamora, Church of San Pedro y San Ildefonso. Photographs by author.

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Table 7.1. Key moments and material or written evidence for the history of the rings from Santo Estevo de Ribas de Sil.

10th century	Retirement of multiple bishops to Santo Estevo; no surviving written or material evidence for initial burials.
1183	Inscription in church. Beginning of thirteenth-century cloister construction, with individual memorial tombs accessible to pilgrims.
1220	Donation by Alfonso IX to Santo Estevo in honour of the "nine bodies of the holy bishops who are buried there."
1463	Collection and elevation of bishops' bodies to retable behind high altar; destruction of memorial tombs in cloister.
1551	First mention of rings? Molina confirms changes of 1463: "behind the high altar, where they are now, and on the fingers of those blessed bodies he found very rich rings."
1572	Morales further confirms that 1463 changes took place: "a rich retable that was made for the high altar, with nine well adorned compartments."
1593–1594	Commission by Abbot Víctor of new retable plus new repositories for the bishops' bodies on north and south walls of presbytery; bodies now split into two groups (five on one side; four on the other).
1621	Yepes confirms that 1594 commission was carried out; now two cabinets holding relics of saintly bones (no mention of rings).
1650s	Tamayo cites rings seen on the hand of bishop with sole surviving epitaph from memorial cloister: "The fingers of Saint Ansuri were found with precious rings still sticking to them."
16th/17th century?	Purse of silk embroidered with metallic threads (see Figure 7.3).
1662	Petition for official recognition of saints, including testimonies of miracles wrought by rings "that they say had belonged to the holy bishops."
17th century	Parchment authentic (see Figure 7.2); present tense indicates active use: "These four rings … Through them water is poured for the sick."
1785	Paper authentic identifying "four rings," late 17th / early 18th century, with additional note referencing changes of 1785 to church furnishings (see Figure 7.1).
2020	Four rings (see Figure 7.5) and two authentics found in silk purse during restoration of church furnishings.
2021–2022	Art/historical investigation, technical analysis (XRF), as part of Treasury Project.

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acted metonymically in the place of the bishops, or as the original artifacts that had been physically removed from their decayed fingers.

From the perspective of a twenty-first-century art historian, the very fact that these rings are *not* magnificent, like those from Celanova associated with St. Rosendo, has become for me an unexpected point in their favour. Although I might have assumed that bishops from the tenth century would possess more impressive rings, like many of those that survive from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, I found that it was the surprise in Yepes's written voice—"how humble were the bishops at that time!"—which ended up convincing me that these four rings could truly be from the tenth century. The Benedictine chronicler was speaking of the Zamoran example, but his words could just as well have described one of our rings at Ribas de Sil: "the ring is very slim, and it must be no more than one *real* of silver in weight … and set within it is a turquoise stone."

Finally, in considering the complexities of dating these silver rings, we would do well to recall the scholar's dilemma as summed up neatly by O. M. Dalton in his magisterial cataloguing of the rings of the British Museum:

> The precise dating of rings in the Middle Ages is often a matter of great difficulty; sometimes it is impossible … The more precise sources of information on which we have to rely may be divided into two main classes—first, the archaeological and artistic; second, the documentary and literary.[49]

Let us rehearse then what can be determined about the rings at Santo Estevo according to these two main classes. Archaeologically speaking, there is nothing in the silver, gold, or niello that rejects a tenth-century date. Nor do the styles suggest modern manufacture: as noted above, the channelled hoop of one ring closely parallels an early medieval example at the British Museum. As for the documentary and literary sources, we can trace the Santo Estevo rings only as far back as 1551, yet references to other silver bishops' rings are a commonplace in tenth-century Iberian documentation. If these rings' simple designs and lack of either inscriptions or extraordinary gemstones leave us little room for a definitive answer, all evidence suggests that they are indeed the rings that were removed from at least one episcopal owner's fingers when the bones of the nine were taken out of their individual tombs in 1463 and moved to a retable behind the high altar at Ribas de Sil.

49 Dalton, *Franks Bequest*, xvii. See also the British Museum's extensive online catalogue, www.britishmuseum.org/collection/, where a search for "finger-ring" yielded over 9,000 holdings.

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The rings seem not to have been activated in their silk sack for another century, yet that they were considered precious is evidenced especially by the ring that has lost its stone: clearly, this contact relic still retained its saintly virtue, even in an incomplete and unprepossessing state.

And like the silver ring hidden at the heart of St. Atilano's reliquary, that is the crux of this research tale: their humble aspect may not fulfill our expectations today, even if Molina in the sixteenth century perceived them as "very rich rings." It may be that our expectation of what is *appropriate* for a medieval saint has been formed by viewing the more splendid rings of later medieval moments; however, tracing the trail of the rings from Santo Estevo (Table 7.1) has led me to conclude that they do indeed appear to be authentic.

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Chapter 8

"CERTAINLY A VERY FINE OBJECT"

MILDRED AND ROBERT WOODS BLISS, COLLECTORS OF JEWELLERY AND WEALTH IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

ELIZABETH McCORD

IN 1937, a substantial collection of rings—including hundreds of medieval rings—went on auction at Sotheby's in London. The collection belonged to Ernest Guilhou (d. 1911), a French collector. Among the hundreds of rings to be auctioned, the catalogue highlighted a seventh-century Byzantine marriage ring, lot 460, what I will refer to as the Guilhou ring (Figure 8.1). The ring had first been in the collection of Baron Jerome Pichon. The preface to the auction catalogue refers to Pichon as one of Guilhou's "brother-collectors" (along with Frédéric Spitzer, another contemporary) whom he had outlived. Guilhou had consequently "bought at [Pichon's and Spitzer's] sales all their most cherished specimens." The 1937 sale drew the notice of Mildred (1879–1969) and Robert Woods Bliss (1875–1962), who were ultimately unsuccessful in purchasing it. Instead, Jacob Hirsch acquired it at the 1937 auction, followed by Joseph Brummer (in 1943), and, only in 1947, the ring arrived at Dumbarton Oaks, the Blisses estate that they had by then transferred to Harvard University.[1]

The Blisses, wealthy collectors of Byzantine and Ancient American Art, were rapidly ramping up their purchase of Byzantine objects in 1937, in preparation for the transfer of Dumbarton Oaks to Harvard University. Mildred, an heiress, and Robert, a diplomat, were step-siblings who mar-

* Portions of this essay originally appeared in McCord, "One Woman's Wealth," 51–58. I thank Elizabeth Dospěl Williams, Carla Galfano, and Jonathan Shea for their help with this earlier iteration. Abbreviations used are: DOIA (Dumbarton Oaks Institutional Archives); MBB (Mildred Barnes Bliss); RT (Royall Tyler); and RWB (Robert Woods Bliss).

1 "Catalogue of the Superb Collection of Rings"; Brummer Gallery Records N5532.

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ried, buying the property they named Dumbarton Oaks in 1920. Their ambition for Dumbarton Oaks—a Georgetown property in Washington, DC that included a Federal-style house built in 1801—was to house research collections in Byzantine, Ancient American, and Garden and Landscape Studies. They began substantial planning for these collections and the transfer to Harvard in 1936, just a year before the Guilhou auction. Central to this planning was the acquisition, advised by their art consultant and friend Royall Tyler, of high quality, beautiful pieces. The auction of Guilhou's "superb collection of rings" contained many such examples, and letters between Tyler and the Blisses contain discussion of around a dozen rings for potential purchase. Central to these discussions was the Guilhou ring, a "most important and rare Byzantine ring."[2]

Byzantine marriage rings, once used to offer good wishes and blessings upon a newly married couple, and possibly as a symbol of the exchange of property that accompanied the rites of marriage, became notable parts of collections across Europe and the United States in the twentieth century. The Guilhou ring, "the early marriage ring of Petros and Theodore," was particularly outstanding. The bezel of the ring depicts the couple—Petros and Theodore (or Theodote) "crowned by haloed figures of Jesus and Mary (or a personification of Ecclesia, the Church), who stand in the center." Surrounding the edge of the ring's bezel, a Greek inscription reads "Lord help thy servants Peter and Theodote." Several biblical scenes are depicted on the ring's edge—the Annunciation, the Salutation, the Nativity, the Presentation at the Temple, the Baptism in Jordan, the Ecce Homo, and the Resurrection. The Blisses and Tyler ultimately judged that such a ring was "of sufficient importance, interest, and of the aesthetic standard we try to maintain."[3]

Using the Bliss and Tyler fascination with the Guilhou ring as an entry point, in this chapter I consider a longer duration of medieval rings' social lives, which extended into the twentieth-century art market. In doing so, I place these rings in the context of collectors' broader financial holdings, highlighting the capitalistic nature of art collecting practices. This approach helps us gain insight into the essential connectivity between wealth and these rings—not only in their original contexts but in this more recent history as well. My analysis relies upon a close-reading of the Bliss–Tyler cor-

2 Carder, "Washington, D.C., and the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library"; "History," Dumbarton Oaks website, www.doaks.org/about/history; "Catalogue of the Superb Collection of Rings."

3 Letter RWB to RT, October 11, 1937; Letter RT to RWB, October 20, 1937; "Catalogue of the Superb Collection of Rings"; Zwirn, "Octagonal Marriage Ring."

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Figure 8.1. Octagonal Marriage Ring with Holy Site Scenes, ca. seventh century. Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1947.15. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduced with permission.

respondence. This collection contains nearly one thousand letters and telegrams between the Blisses and Royall Tyler from the years 1902 through 1953, gifted by Royall Tyler's son to the Harvard University Archives in the 1970s and digitized beginning in 2008. These letters include personal correspondence between friends as well as, particularly in the 1930s and 1940s, conversations about potential art acquisitions. In addition to these letters, I rely upon files from the Dumbarton Oaks archives relating to Mildred Bliss' will in order to gain a fuller understanding of her holdings in addition to the formal Dumbarton Oaks collection.

Portable Wealth: Rings as Commodities

The Guilhou ring is somewhat typical of marriage rings of the seventh century—several extant rings depict the married couple and inscriptions blessing the couple to be married. Marriage rings such as this one were typically made of gold and therefore the cost of such a ring would only have been affordable to upper class families. For example, a lighter gold ring in the Dumbarton Oaks collection weighs approximately 4.4 grams or the weight of one solidus, which equates to around one month's average wages at the time, already out of reach for non-elites. However, the religious scenes depicted on the facets of the Guilhou ring's band; the greater weight of the ring; and the fact that, as observed in a more recent catalogue entry, the hollowed-out bodies of the bride and groom on the ring's bezel suggest that they previously held gemstones, likely indicate that this particular marriage ring was much more costly.[4]

4 Williams, "Women, Wealth, and the Late Antique Household," 20; Zwirn, "Octagonal Marriage Ring"; Alicia Walker noted that a similar ring found in a seventh-century archaeological context has been associated with the Byzantine emperor Constans II, and therefore this ring may also originate from the imperial circle, see Walker, "Marriage," n. 73.

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Although marriage rings were not necessarily exchanged in betrothal or marriage ceremonies, they did play a role in the exchange of wealth involved in Byzantine marriages, and this ring could likely have served as a part of this exchange between members of a wealthy bridal couple. This function distinguishes the function of Byzantine marriage rings from those of marriage rings in early and high medieval Western Europe, where gifting of rings upon betrothal or marriage was not common.[5] Grooms typically gave marriage jewellery to their brides, but women had to bring wealth to the marriage as well. Byzantine weddings were expected to be between social equals and Byzantine law protected women's dowries as inalienable, meaning husbands could not use or profit from them during the marriage. Though modern Western marriage practices typically do not include such an explicit exchange of wealth as dowries or bridal gifts, they do still involve financial dealings—particularly for the very wealthy. Prenuptial agreements, for example, are becoming increasingly popular in the United States.[6]

Just as in the medieval era, ownership of the Guilhou ring would continue to be limited to a small, wealthy elite in the twentieth century. At the 1937 auction, the ring sold for £1,120 (around £64,000 today). This was by far the highest price of any object in the auction, as well as being over three times the estimate that Sotheby's had communicated to Royall Tyler prior to the sale. Such an extreme mark-up caught the attention of, and drew alarm from, the Blisses and Tyler. Tyler wrote in a letter to Robert Bliss a few days after the sale: "I was horrified by the prices fetched by the Byzantine things at the Guilhou sale. It is dreadful that No 460 should have fetched £1120." He went on to express concern that Elie Bustros, from whom the Blisses were in the process of buying the Byzantine marriage belt (BZ.1937.33) that is a centrepiece of the Dumbarton Oaks museum's collection, would hear of the sale: "I only hope that the prices reached at the Guilhou sale will not come to Bustros's knowledge." In a letter the next day, Tyler wrote that he was "still suffering from the shock of No 460 having gone for £1120."[7]

Tyler's concern centred on what the sale price of the Guilhou ring would mean for the market in Byzantine art. Up to this point, the Blisses had benefited from the relatively lower prices of Byzantine pieces compared to the more popular Ancient or Renaissance artworks. Reiterating the poten-

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5 See Chapters 1 and 3 in this volume.

6 Walker, "Marriage"; Williams, "Women, Wealth, and the Late Antique Household," 15–20; Waters, "Prenups Aren't Just for Rich People Anymore."

7 "Superb Collection of Rings," 240; Letter RT to RWB, October 20, 1937; Letter RT to RWB, November 16, 1937; Letter RT to RWB, November 17, 1937.

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tial impact of the Guilhou sale on the marriage belt's price, Tyler wrote on November 20 of that same year: "I was really frightened lest [Bustros] might have got wind of the prices fetched at the Guichon [sic] sale, on the 11th, by the Byz. things. If that ring No. 460 (with the nielloed scenes) fetched £1120, which it did, what would the belt have fetched? Certainly more, I should say: perhaps twice as much." Two months later, Tyler reiterated the concern for the changing prices of Byzantine art: "The other disquieting thing that keeps recurring to my mind is the terrific price which [Jacob] Hirsch gave for that Byzantine ring in London. If that price is taken as a standard, then the Madonna [BZ.1938.62] might easily be worth, even to a dealer, more than what you paid for the round Emperor [BZ.1937.23]."[8]

Concern for the changing prices of artworks, and what they might mean for the Blisses' portfolio, were not unique to this one instance. Like the collecting of other wealthy cultural philanthropists, the Blisses' collecting was necessarily an economic process. The art market, like any other segment of the market economy, responded to changes in supply and demand. Due to the insular nature of the market for antiquities, buyers such as the Blisses yielded great influence. The Blisses' correspondence with Tyler at times reads as a Who's Who of early-twentieth-century wealth, with mentions of Andrew and Bunny Mellon, J. P. Morgan, and Arthur Sachs (of Goldman Sachs).[9] Their letters frequently mention price negotiations for artworks and the effect of new archaeological finds on pricing for certain types of artifacts. These conversations bear an alarming casualness when one considers that in our time there have been growing demands for the return of cultural objects derived from illicit archaeological excavations.[10]

8 Letter RT to RWB, November 20, 1937; Letter RT to RWB, January 10, 1938.

9 Letter RT to MBB, March 14, 1931; Letter RT to MBB, June 17, 1929. The letter of March 14, 1931 contains an interesting discussion of the behaviour of art dealers trying to artificially influence the market: "I imagine that the Soviets, while very anxious to sell, are doing all they can to avoid their sales being talked about, and are only allowing people whom they regard as serious clients to see the important works they are offering for sale, in order to avoid the effect on the market which would be produced if it were generally known that they were selling on a large scale."

10 Anderson and Ivanova, eds., *Is Byzantine Studies a Colonialist Discipline?* See especially "Introduction," 1–38; and in the same volume Winnik, "The South Kensington Museum," 145–52. An example of Royall Tyler and the Blisses conversations about price negotiations is in Letter MBB to RT, July 29, 1938: "But what can we do about those prices? It is too amusing his saying that Robert always beats him down. Of course he does. What a fool we should be if we followed Kelek's [Dikran Kelekian] first figures. And whereas the first figures may be put up so as to

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Perhaps the Blisses were particularly attuned to getting a good deal on certain artworks due to the relatively recent growth of the Blisses' fortune. Mildred and Robert Woods Bliss's enormous wealth was primarily Mildred's. Her father, Demas Barnes, owned significant stock in the Centaur Company—a pharmaceutical manufacturer. On his death, in 1888, his stock went to Mildred's half-sister Cora Barnes, and on her death, in 1911, to Mildred. Mildred and her mother, Anna Blaksley Bliss, sold the stock in 1923 for $13 million, and on Anna's death, in 1935, Mildred inherited more than $12 million ($260 million today).[11] Thus the considerable balance of the funds used by the Blisses to expand the Dumbarton Oaks collection came into their possession just two years before their attempted purchase of the Guilhou ring.[12]

Regardless of the reason for it, the Blisses and Tyler carefully considered the prices at which they would be willing to purchase even the most coveted items. As Robert Bliss wrote to Tyler in 1938, sometimes "risks of losing a fine thing have to be taken." The Blisses took such a risk in the case of the Guilhou ring, although they did pursue it even after the initial auction. In early December 1937, Robert wrote to Tyler that he had stopped by to see Jacob Hirsch and the ring, noting that "it is certainly a very fine object, but I do not yet feel like giving Hirsch the price he paid for it, plus a reasonable percentage ... I did not ask him what his selling price would be, but I did ask him how much he would ask for [a different ring from the auction], and he calmly said $600 net; he paid £45 for it at the auction. For [another ring], for which he paid £52, he asked me $1300." While we do not know the price Hirsch eventually sold the prized Guilhou ring for, Joseph Brummer—a dealer with galleries in New York and Paris from whom the Blisses frequently bought art—purchased the ring in 1943 from Aldo Jandolo for $5,700 (over $100,000 today) and sold it to Dumbarton Oaks for $8,000 (around $112,000 today) four years later. Seven years earlier, in 1940, Brummer had gifted the Blisses two simpler marriage rings (BZ.1940.32 and BZ.1940.33). Such gifts were a

enable him to graciously come down, that was certainly not the case with Hestia as he never came down and kept us some seventeen years!"

11 Carder, *A Home for the Humanities*, 5, 12; "Cora F. Barnes, Last Will and Testament, 1911," available at Ancestry.com; "Anna B. Bliss, Last Will and Testament, 1935," available at Ancestry.com; "Miss C. F. Barnes Left $4,952,195"; "$12,386,000 Estate Left by Mrs. Bliss."

12 "Cora F. Barnes, Last Will and Testament, 1911"; Anna B. Bliss, Last Will and Testament, 1935"; "Miss C. F. Barnes Left $4,952,195"; "$12,386,000 Estate Left by Mrs. Bliss."

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Figure 8.2. Marriage Ring, ca. sixth–seventh century. Dumbarton Oaks, BZ.1969.77. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC. Reproduced with permission.

tool for cementing relationships with clients, paying off later when the clients purchased other more valuable works at higher prices. This strategy called back to the long history of patron–client relationships built on gift-giving, including in late antiquity where gift-exchange was integral to the formation of alliances and preservation of position in society. In the case of the Blisses' purchase of the Guilhou ring, Brummer's gifts bore fruit when he realized a forty percent profit on this sale. Though this sale took place after the transfer of Dumbarton Oaks to Harvard in 1940, it realized the ambition of the Blisses to own the exceptional marriage ring and concluded the collecting social life of this ring.[13]

A Ring in Good Company: Mildred Bliss's Personal Collection

Though exceptional, however, the Guilhou ring is far from the only example of a marriage ring in the Dumbarton Oaks collection. The collection has at least eight others, including another (BZ.1947.18) originally purchased by Jacob Hirsch at the Guilhou sale—for which Hirsch had asked Bliss for $1300—and later purchased by Joseph Brummer, who sold it to Dumbarton Oaks (then part of Harvard University) in 1947.[14] The last marriage ring to enter the Dumbarton Oaks collection (BZ.1969.77), itself had an interesting social life (Figure 8.2).

13 Letter RT to RWB, January 10, 1938; Brummer Gallery Records N5532; Messer, "Origen of Alexandria"; Brummer justified his high prices as part of a strategy to "have extremely cordial business relations with agents abroad ... To have such relations with these agents it is necessary that one purchase many objects of minor quality constantly in the hope that someday these people may have something extraordinary on which he shall have first call. All those unimportant pieces we are obliged to sell at a loss. It is therefore a matter of absolute necessity that we make profit on the few exceptional objects which we can secure," cited in Brennan, "The Brummer Gallery," 112.

14 The marriage rings in the Dumbarton Oaks collection are: BZ.1947.18, BZ.1953.12.3, BZ.1953.12.4, BZ.1953.12.8, BZ.1959.60, BZ.1961.3, BZ.1968.7, BZ.1969.77.

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Included in Mildred Bliss's will, on her passing in 1969, were several pieces that would become part of the Dumbarton Oaks collection. Having transferred Dumbarton Oaks' collection to Harvard in 1940, the Blisses continued their personal collection—largely of furnishings—with the intent to donate them to Dumbarton Oaks on their deaths. One bequeathed piece was a Byzantine marriage ring Robert's sister Annie had gifted the couple on their wedding anniversary in 1958. Annie's gift resembles one potential original purpose of Byzantine marriage jewellery—a gift to congratulate, protect, and convey blessings upon the couple. It was also not the first collection item the Blisses received in connection to their marriage. On their wedding day itself, Mildred's mother Anna—who bequeathed her fortune to Mildred in 1935—gave the couple a Gothic tapestry (BZ.1908.01.(T)). This tapestry today is prominently displayed in the Dumbarton Oaks music room, once the Blisses' room for entertaining and the location of the 1944 Dumbarton Oaks Conversations—a diplomatic meeting that laid the groundwork for the formation of the United Nations. Still another gift came from Thomas Whittemore, an archaeologist and founder of the Byzantine Institute, who gifted the Blisses several small fragments from the Kariye Camii archaeological site for their fiftieth anniversary.[15]

This collection of marriage gifts reflects the varying meanings of their collections for the Blisses. While they held a genuine fascination with the Byzantine and Ancient American worlds, they were also wealthy collectors interested in portraying their wealth to their social world. In the same bequest that included the marriage ring from Annie Bliss and Whittemore's fragments, the art and furniture listed alone were worth nearly $200,000, which is more than $1.5 million in today's money. The probate record lists each item alongside its appraised value, akin to accountings of late antique dowries preserved in documentary papyri.[16]

As previously mentioned, the Blisses' collecting was also a thoroughly financial exercise, reflected in their concern for and haggling over prices. Placing their art collection in the context of their, and particularly Mildred's, broader financial holdings further reveals its significance as a financial legacy and as a tool of social power. Mildred and Robert's annual income was primarily passive income from stocks. Although Robert was employed as an ambassador, his annual salary would have paled in comparison to dividends

15 Probate Record for 1537 28th St, NW, Washington, DC, 1969, Blissiana, Folder: Bliss, Mildred Barnes: Estate, Dumbarton Oaks Institutional Archives, Washington DC.

16 Probate Record for 1537 28th St, NW, Washington, DC, 1969, Blissiana, Folder: Bliss, Mildred Barnes: Estate, DOIA, Washington DC.

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from Mildred's inheritance. Consequently, changes in the market and regulations concerning capital gains could have implications for their collecting ambitions. In February 1931, Mildred passed on buying a rug from Asia Minor due to her fear that there would be "increasing taxation in the United States," but expressed hope that the Blisses' financial advisor would help limit the damage done. In considering the purchase of the tapestry "Fragments of a Hanging with Nereid" (BZ.1934.2), Mildred wrote to Tyler that "after seeing our lawyer and gaining some idea of what one's income is likely to be for 1932, we will cable [you]." While at times declines in the stock market limited the Blisses' purchasing, they were also able to take advantage of unstable market conditions due to the Great Depression and World War Two.[17]

In addition to their stock portfolio and art collection—of which personal ornaments were a prominent part—Mildred Bliss's own jewellery collection was extremely valuable. In January 1970, the Parke-Bernet gallery auctioned her personal collection of 112 pieces for over $420,000, over $3.3 million today. Dumbarton Oaks was the beneficiary of the sale. In an annotated copy of the auction catalogue, someone (perhaps an executor or lawyer handling Mildred's estate) included the appraisal value from the probate record, the price range suggested by Parke-Bernet, and the final sale value of each item. In a note included inside the inner cover, this same person has noted the exact number of items that sold below the value included in the probate record.[18]

Concern for an exact measure of the wealth stored in these jewels reveals that in materials as well as in function, Mildred's jewellery resembled that of the women of late antique society. While late antique women adorned themselves with jewels to signal wealth and the ability to afford expensive materials, the discovery of adornments in archaeological hoards alongside collections of gold coins suggests that they were also simply elements of a family fortune. Moreover, Mildred's most exquisite, and most valuable, pieces feature gems that in antiquity travelled for months from sources in India, Sri Lanka, Egypt, and elsewhere. In fact, these materials remained so in fashion in the early twentieth century that Belle da Costa Greene, first director of the Morgan Library and herself an expert in illuminated manuscripts, owned a pair of Byzantine pearl and sapphire earrings. Similarly to Mildred Bliss,

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17 Carder, *A Home for the Humanities*, 5, 12; Letter MBB to RT, February 14, 1931; Letter MBB to RT, November 11, 1931; Carder, "Washington D.C. and the Dumbarton Oaks Research Library."

18 "Parke-Bernet Sale to Benefit Harvard"; Correspondence Re: Estate, Blissiana, Folder: Bliss, Mildred Barnes: Estate, DOIA, Washington, DC.

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who bequeathed her collection for the benefit of Dumbarton Oaks, Greene bequeathed her personal jewel collection to the Morgan Library to be sold with proceeds benefitting the Library.[19]

The highlights of the auction of Mildred Bliss's jewels included an unusual brooch shaped like a peacock feather made up of sapphires, emeralds, topazes, amethyst, and diamonds. Discussion of the brooch in contemporary newspapers solidified its status as a piece of valuable property, rather than merely a beautiful accessory. In 1970, a Tiffany's jewellery designer noted that the labour costs required to make such an object would be "prohibitively expensive" making it "flamboyant, but not economically sound." Such description reflects the Blisses' correspondence with Tyler over the feasibility of purchasing the Guilhou marriage ring at Hirsch's asking price.[20]

As reported following the auction, the head of the jewellery department at Parke-Bernet noted the significance of the Bliss auction in establishing price points for coloured gems:

> The big jewel market today is in coloured stones, but no one really knows the value of a ruby, for example. It's different with diamonds ... But the depth and quality of colour in a coloured stone cannot be measured. It has different esthetic appeals to different people. The Bliss collection is remarkable. We haven't had a sale with such a comprehensive spread of good colour stones since 1966. The fact that it drew high prices indicates that even in a tight money economy, coloured stones are holding their appeal.

The article went on to note that dealers at the auction house would be advising their associates worldwide to raise coloured gem prices as a result. Both the prices fetched by sought-after Byzantine art as well as by much-desired gems demonstrate how buyers and sellers influenced prices on the art market.[21]

Mildred Bliss's friends recalled seeing her wear the flamboyant brooch only once, and in general they were not aware of the size and value of the entire collection, because she did not wear much of it or speak of it often. Instead, Mildred's jewellery was largely treated as inherited wealth—she received much of it in her mother's will—and it remained unworn. And yet the value of her collection of jewels was somehow known. Following her death, numerous jewellers contacted the executors of her estate to express

19 Williams, "Women, Wealth, and the Late Antique Household," 19. Williams argues for a reinterpretation of late antique jewellery and household adornments as symbols of wealth; Belle da Costa Greene is the subject of a major 2024–2025 exhibition at the Morgan Library. See www.themorgan.org/belle-greene/exhibition.

20 Ross, "Rather Nice Jewels."

21 Nadel, "Bliss Auction Lifts Colored Gem Prices."

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interest in handling the sale of her collection. Some had been party to earlier sales of smaller amounts of her jewellery. Others may have simply acted on the assumption that a woman of such great wealth would necessarily own significant, valuable adornments.[22]

Mildred's primary ownership of much of the Bliss's wealth parallels the wealth of the ring's potential original owners. It also is a culmination of women's position as holders of wealth in Western culture for centuries prior. For example, the origin of the marker "Mrs." is not in representing marriage status but in recognizing certain property-owning women as "Mistress—shortened to Mrs." In early modern Britain, for example, women called Mrs. were primarily identified this way because they owned capital, regardless of whether they were married. Moreover, recent scholarship has shown a more insidious side to American women's wealth. White women—long thought by historians to be passive participants in the institution of slavery—were active participants and enslavers themselves.[23]

Mildred Bliss was not alone as a controller of substantial wealth—just as her Byzantine counterparts were not. Indeed, she was not even alone in the world of twentieth-century art collecting. Other wealthy women collectors include Dominique de Menil and Helene Crocker—both of whom owned objects now in the Dumbarton Oaks collection.[24] For these women, their collections served as signifiers of status—both in evidencing their financial capability to engage in the trade of antiquities and in connoting their sophisticated interests, much as demonstrating one's *paideia* ("literacy") was a tool of elites in late antiquity. For their late antique counterparts, conveying knowledge of classical Greek and Roman mythologies through household objects and jewellery signalled sophistication and access to education.

* * *

The continued value of medieval rings and other jewellery—from a medieval transfer of property to the twentieth-century art market—offers the opportunity to reflect on the commodity value of such objects. While in their original Byzantine worlds, rings such as the Guilhou ring symbolized the

22 Ross, "Rather Nice Jewels"; "Anna B. Bliss, Last Will and Testament, 1935"; Correspondence Re: Estate, Blissiana, Folder: Bliss, Mildred Barnes: Estate, DOIA, Washington, DC.

23 Erickson, "Mistresses and Marriage," 39–57; Jones-Rogers, *They Were Her Property*.

24 Menil's object is Loan.BZ.2000.001, a grooved turning key bit that fits into a seal ring, BZ.1958.19. Crocker's objects are BZ.1960.60 and BZ.1966.7.

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wealth transfer present in marriage rites, in the twentieth century the art market dictated these rings' value, at times confounding the expectations of seasoned collectors such as the Blisses and Tyler. These rings became part of substantial collections that facilitated wealth transfer over generations—whether to Ernest Guilhou's heirs or to the beneficiaries of Dumbarton Oaks research fellowships in the present day. Collectors such as the Blisses were keenly aware of the financial implications of their acquisitions, considering them alongside personal wealth that, in the case of Mildred Bliss, included her own inherited jewellery collection. Alongside their financial understanding of their collection, the Blisses and Tyler appreciated the rings' aesthetic value as they sought to create a collection of only high quality, beautiful items. The later lives of these rings can therefore be understood as legacies of multiple kinds—a testament to both the collectors' wealth as well as their elite status as appreciators of far-off worlds.

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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]

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*.

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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

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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.*

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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;

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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.

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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

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*.

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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

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

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

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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.

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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*.

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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*.

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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."

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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;

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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,

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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.

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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.

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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.*

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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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