EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE RING

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Although the art of lapidary[1] has been practiced since earliest recorded times and has spread to all lands, little is known of the techniques. Man, through all the ages has been charmed by the beauty of gems and precious stones, and centuries even before the Christian era, man was cutting and polishing various types of quartz as well as harder stones.

Remains found among the Neolithic pile-dwellers, ten to twelve thousand years ago prove that these early lake-dwellers took great pride in their hair because pins and ornaments of bone have been found along with necklaces of teeth. With the coming of the Bronze Age they used gold, rare stones, jet and amber with solid gold geometric designs of good taste and showed exceptional skill in craftsmanship.[2]

The ring is the article of jewelry around which is centered tradition, antiquity, utility and symbolical meaning of the greatest reverential character.[3] From earliest periods it has been cut, forged and hammered out of metals and other materials and worn by all peoples, barbaric and civilized. It is associated with magic rites, ancient beliefs, ceremonials and to commemerate ties of friendship. A circlet of gold has always been the emblem of respect, trust and dignity. Unadorned it is still given in marriage. The circle has long stood as symbolizing Eternity. Ancient Druid temples, sun worshipers and mounds tell the faith and belief of the ancient peoples.

They copied the roundness of the sun because it gave wormth, light and shelter. Until recent years in Russia the bridegroom wore a ring of gold as an emblem of the sun, the bride a ring of silver as an emblem of the moon.

The common folk have always had rings which have a religious meaning to them, often given and worn in the prevailing custom and faith of that nation. Early Christians embellished theirs with a cross. Later three tiny beads were added representing the Trinity.

Rings have been made of gold, silver, bronze, iron, stone, jet. Some are plain, some ornamented and engraved, some used as seals and signets, some set with precious stones and gems. Rings may have symbolic meaning or show position and wealth of the wearer. From the graves of the historic peoples have been recovered rings of metal, stone and jet. Simple rings in Scotland were a form of currency and even today barbaric peoples use armlets and rings this way. Some curious rings have been found in Ireland with perforations which may have been used as brooches.

The Etruscans and Greeks possessed many gems and their rings were numerous. Early Egyptians set theirs with the engraved scarabs. This beetle was a sacred symbol of Kheper, the source of creative power. The early Roman rings were performed by Greek slaves.

It was thought rings were used as a matter of convenience for carrying the charms and protective powers which the wearer thought

went with them. Old Roman rings were hand forged and solid. Others were only gold cased, some being hollow and thought to contain poisons; in the early days of uncertainty and intrigue.

Romans wore rings of iron and bronze, gold being worn only by persons possessing property; freed men also had the right to wear gold. Plain signet and bronze rings were worn by men on either hand and set stones on the left hand. It being considered effeminate to wear them on the right. Pliny says the Gauls and Britons wore them on the middle finger only. Wealthy Romans had rings for special occassions and even for various seasons. Heavy rings of bronze for winter and lighter weight ones for summer. Birthday rings were worn on the natal day. The Roman matron wore a ring to which was attached a small key, symbolizing her authity and right to carry the keys of the house.
In the London Guildhall Museum are some brass rings deeply incised dating before the Norman invasion in 1066. Silver rings were hammered by hand, no drawn wire being known. They were set with jasper using green glass for the bezel.

In Anglo-Saxon days rings of gold were badges of nobility, worn on the third finger of the right hand. A curious prayer ring of bone was found in Scotland. Many found in France bear the emblem of the owners with their seal and crests. These were massive Seal and signet rings were used on documents and letters written by professional scribes and affixed with wax. Roman matrons used their seal rings to seal wine jars. Signet rings were common in Italy and England. Head stones were often engraved with the coat of arms, monogrames and crests, after the owners rings.

Stone rings were cut from solid stone and are not uncommon among ancient gems. Romans were fond of amber and jasper, and Ireland had many of stome and jet.

The seventeenth and eighteenth century have made rings as love tokens, popular. Some are sentementally engraved, some set with stones. Flowers often accompanied the gift and were then known as "posie" rings. The betrothal ceremonial ring does nor seem to go back farther than the sixteenth century.[4]

Early Anglo-Saxons have a gift of rings, blessed by a Christian priest and worn until marriage. Shakespeare speaks of plighting the troth by "breaking" the ring, one half kept by each party until the day of the marriage, when the bride then wore the whole ring.

The plain gold hoop signifies complete union of man and wife "until death do us part" as a symbol of Eternity. The ring of gold also implies that the man trusted her with the custody of his house and treasure.

Cardinals wore rings as the symbols of authority and bishops today wear them for the same reason. The Pope is given a "Fisherman's" ring when he is elected. In conferring the office on a Bishop the ring and pastoral staff were given together. Originally the ring was a symbol of authority given back to the Emporer on the Bishop's death, but later it was buried with the owner.[5]

The sapphire is the stone chosen for epoiscopal rings as indicative

of perpetual chastity. Both amethysts and spphires were worn by prelates of the fourteenth century. Certain stones were believed to cure or prevent infections, others protected the wearer against diseases, so prevalent in those days.

The faithful reproduction of many rings in famous paintings have lead to identification of the portrait because of the detail of coat of arms and signets.

Memorial rings of the Holy Sepulchre and mourning rings given to friends and relatives of the deceased, have been found. Rings of the Middle Ages show little originality and explain the similarity in museum pieces.

Gold and silver remain supreme for rings[6] because they do not rust, and when polished the lustre and beauty which needs no stones or gems to enhance them. They may become an exquisite backing for precious gems. They can be worked by every method known to the metal craftsman. They can be beaten and shaped to sheets or drawn to fine wire. They can be worked so thin as to be used for overlay or "plate".[7]

Nuggets of gold have been used as charms before the use of copper. Even before 4,000BC the Egyptians made gold handles for their flint knives. Gold for them ws plentiful and was used in the form of rings as money when exporting to Syria, Assyria and Babylon.

Gold and gold chain is mentioned in Genisis. The Isrealites were masters in casting, engraving, embossing and jeweler's work. They made spoons, rings, hooks, alters, tables, lamps, tongs, basins

candlesticks, cups, bowls, dishes and idols- all of gold. Later the greats ource was Ireland where it flourished about 1,000BC.

Jewelry means objects worn on the body or carried in the hand.[8] Plate are objects of utility made of the precious metal or covered by the metal. Most articles of plate are to be stored or placed upon a piece of furniture. The meaning of "jewel" as a precious stone is more recent and is usually meant to be a single article. Almost every land has its special kind of jewelry. It is impossible to confuse Chinese, Anglo-Saxon, Egyptian and Indian. Experts can tell the town, region or local where a piece of jewlry was made and even give the date.

Rings tell something of the history, the laws and customs of different countries and its peoples.[9] They are links in the chain of history with their beauty, color and workmanship to inspre us. Rings are associated with religion, law, love and death. Besides being worn on the fingers or arms as amulets, they were carried on a string and worn around the neck so that they hung on the chest. Romans covered every finger, even to the joints, to the point of almost being ludicrous.

During the Middle Ages rings were often enameled and were worn by the common folk as distinguished from the "crown" or "ecclesiastical" jewelry.[10] The Renaissance ring was eleborate with enamel, ameos and figures in full relief. By the eighteenth century the diamond began its reign and has been the ring stone ever since.

The ring of death contained poison and later carried cosmetics or tiny pills. The wedding ring was not adopted by the

Christians antil about 860. They were not the plain circlet used now but were highly decorated.[11] The custom was pagan and so was not welcomed by the church. At the time of the Commonwealth it was considered "heathenish" and was discouraged, though not entirely abondoned. In some countries both men and women wear them.

Gimmel or "twin" rings were so constructed as to form a perfect ring when together and were often given when one person went on a journey, which in those days was hazardous, or to identify a messenger. In oriental countries they have puzzle rings which cannot br worn except when the two parts are together. Decade rings took the place of the rosaries and had ten projections and a bezel or knob. Each projection represented an Ave and the bezel the Pasternoster. These date back to the fourteenth century. The Giardinetti rings had bezels of delicate work with flowers arranged in vases and dated from the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

Marquise rings from the last half of the eighteenth century were large being an inch to an inch and a half long, filling the space between the knuckle and first joint, usually oval or octagonal often curing to fit the finger.

As a wedding symbol a bracelet was worn long before a ring.[12] The early cave man bound his beloved's wrists with woven sweet grasses. He usually bound her ankles as well and carried her home over his shoulder. Gradually these binders became symbolical, and the bride wore plaited flowers and grasses as bracelets, and then rings. The old grass band wasn't much to show off among

maids and soon rings were carved of stone, wood, amber, ivory or flint, whatever was most available in that area. When the Roman legionaires came into Europe they slipped leather thongs on the maidens of their choice, to indicate the girls were "taken", and started the betrothal ring. In Egypt and Palestine rings were of beaten copper or gold because of the plentiful supply. The ancient mathematicians recognized the circle as the symbol of eternity and hoped that woman's love would follow the same orbit. A third ring was often given to the witness to the ceremony.

When embellished with stones the diamond became a symbol of purity, truth and fidelity. It had an inner fire which the ancients couldn't explain, and therefore made the diamond above all others.

Iceland made theirs of stone, bone or ivory, carved by the bridegroom with considerable artistry. The size depended on the material at hand, and often became a bracelet instead. In India women wear plain bands of silver or iron on their thumbs. The early Egyptians believed the circlet symbolized the "heavenly sign that life and happiness and love have no beginning and no ending." The ancient Hebrews felt the ring served a dual purpose. It was both a good luck charm and a wedding ring in one. Often it was inscribed "Good Luck". In ancient Eturia artists and craftsmen used the form of the dove and birds to bring peace and harmony to the wearer. The early Crusaders are credited with bringing the orange blossom to the ceremony as a wreath for her head. The myths of the Greeks show orange blossoms and fruit as decorations symbolical for the wedding. It was long a European

to have the double ring ceremony, and was revived in America during World War II. Before that time in this country only about 15 percent used the double ring ceremony, but during the war its usage rose to 95 percent. The bride wanted him "tagged" to come home to her, and he wanted ~~xxx~~ to have a reminder of the girl back home. The War Production board restricted the use of gold to 75 per cent of the 1941 production, but 80 per cent of married couples in 1945 and 1946 used the double ring ceremony. It is believed the custom is here to stay.

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