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## RINGS AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AMONG THE NATIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST AND CENTRAL ASIA

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### Annotation

This article explores the historical aspects of rings as personal accessories for men and women in the culture of the Middle East and Central Asia. The origin and development of different kinds of rings, their materials and techniques are reviewed.

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**Introduction.** Many people are interested in the national traditions, customs and applied arts of the citizens of other countries. This interest encourages them to visit museums when they travel to another country. This will lead to the rapid development of tourism.

The main thing that attracts many tourists is the works of applied art.

Since ancient times people have learned how to shape stone and make jewelry with this material. With the advent of writing came the need to create personal signatures and seals for important documents. The first seals were stone or clay cylinders, which were various signs identifying the owner or containing some information. The most ancient examples date back to the cultures of Ancient Egypt, Sumer and Babylon. As time went on, seals came to live in the form of rings which high-ranking officials could carry with them. This made it easier to carry seals on their sides. As a result, rings were originally born as an item of accessory for men, not women. Even in the era of Islamic culture, when women's jewelry was completely developed, this provision did not lose its meaning, and men for a long time used rings as a seal.

Rings are made of precious metals and copper alloys by casting or forging. Gold rings are decorated with precious stones. A separate group of rings is made with stones "eyes", similar to the eyes. Such stones are the most ancient talisman in the history of mankind and are still popular in the Middle East, mostly among men.

Military campaigns also contributed to the changing or spreading of jewelry. The exchange of cultures took place as a result. For example, the campaigns of Alexander the Great left a profound mark on the

culture of the peoples living in the mountains of Iran. The influx of Hellenistic culture into the countries of the Ancient East led to the emergence of crafts and craftsmanship. Traditional forms of ancient Iranian art are intertwined with Hellenistic laws of beauty, a new style emerges, an effect that can also be observed in later periods. Archaeological finds of the Greco-Bactrian period in Afghanistan (1st century AD, excavations at Mt. Tilla) include giant gold rings decorated with natural jewelry with precious stones and ornaments.<sup>1</sup> The jewelry is made in the form of an oval, repeating the shape of the ring. The stone is also considered convex, cabochon-shaped or flat cut metal, in which case the ring is particularly important because it contains an image made in relief or counter-relief. Sometimes the central part is surrounded by small round inlays, a style that was later applied to Uzbek and Tajik jewelry until the 20th century.

As the art of writing and the art of jewelry developed, a variety of images appeared to be applied to the surface of the ring. Most of them used figurative images, which served as the main image.

**The majority of symbols used in European countries.** Sometimes rings are considered a symbol of personal or family military rank. If we take only the ancient city of Pompeii during the excavations, a lot of jewelry was found on ashes of the remains of many women. Many of the rings and bracelets found among the jewels depicted Venus, the patroness of Pompeii. Pompeian and Roman jewelry was influenced by Egyptian and Etruscan cultures. For this reason, we often see the image of the snake in jewelry. The rings usually have a special accent on the head of the snake, and its eyes are decorated with precious stones.

Medieval images depicted on rings featured biblical events. Among the rings made by wealthy aristocrats, rings made in England in the 15th century are of great importance. The rings are usually made of "pure gold," and each wall base is described as adorned with precious stones such as rubies and amethysts. The properties of these precious stones are recorded in written sources known as lapidaries. These pamphlets are some of the best books that provide detailed information about the various animals associated with Christian allegorical history.

One of the stones found in medieval tombs is sapphire. Sapphire rings were worn by bishops and archbishops. An example of this can be found in the tomb of Archbishop Walter Gray of York (died 1255), and they were found in the tomb of Archbishop William Wheatley of Canterbury (died 1374). Usually, such rings were given for a time to take an oath as a symbol of devotion to the church.

There are also many iconographic rings, mostly with images of Bibi Mariam. By the 16th century, lepidote stone rings had become a tradition. This is because this stone was used to detect poison. The eyes of these stone rings were golden, resembling a dome.

The importance of the rings in the Islamic world. With the advent of Islam in the Middle East, figurative images receded into the background. They are replaced by geometric patterns and religious inscriptions. Materials have a special meaning. Various precious and hard semi-precious stones are used as additions to rings and ringstones: rubies, emeralds, jadeite, amethyst, quartz, various varieties of agate (carnelian, onyx, etc.). Coral and turquoise are less suitable. These stones are mostly used in women's jewelry. There are almost no corals in our country, but turquoise is widely used.

There are also seals engraved on lapis lazuli (sapphire), a stone that has been very popular in the East since ancient times. In addition to the classic shapes - round and oval - rectangular square, hexagonal and octagonal seals are becoming popular. Stones can be flat or angular.

During the Seljuk period (10th-13th centuries A.D.) a peculiar style of sealed men's rings emerged - a large and shiny stone wrapped in a high hollow setting with four prongs. In order to save metal (gold) all the elements are made of thin forged or embossed sheet with soldered convex plates decorated with

<sup>1</sup> Afghanistan. Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul. / — Washington: National Geographic Society, 2009. — 242-290 p

flowers and geometric ornamentation, which creates the illusion of a massive monolithic ornament<sup>2</sup>. A similar method is found in the Sassanid period (3rd-7th centuries AD),<sup>3</sup> but since the Seljuk period rings often have large "architectural" forms. During this period, rings of silver and cheaper alloys were often made by casting. A distinctive feature of Seljuk men's rings is the characteristic thickening at the base of the horn. The style of this period can be seen in Iranian and Afghan jewelry until the early 20th century.

Rings were also used in the household. Such rings can be called "archery rings". These are rings of a special shape designed to protect the fingers when shooting with an arrow. Such a ring has a triangular or claw-shaped wide stem located along the phalanx. By the XIX century this form lost its functional purpose and became an attribute of women's folk jewelry<sup>4</sup>.

In the Middle Ages and later, the wearing of rings was shrouded in various myths. In the Islamic world, rings with carnelian are particularly popular, often worn on the little finger; the Prophet Muhammad is believed to have had such a ring. A ring with the name of the owner becomes a decoration of masculine status. Such an inscription could be ordered regardless of the engraver, but such a ring would have special significance when presented by a ruler to his subordinate.

Today in the Islamic world, the use of gold in the manufacture of men's rings is disappearing. This is because the Quran forbids men to wear gold jewelry (these restrictions do not apply to women). In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, 80-90% of silver alloys were used in the life of rings.

During this period in the Central Asian region there was a tradition of wearing special rings and rings by certain professions: barbers, butchers, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The inscriptions on the Middle Eastern rings of the Islamic period are mostly in Arabic. Particular attention is paid to the decorative execution of the inscription. Different styles and letters were used for this purpose. The first specimens (before the 12th century A.D.) were made of the letter "kufi"<sup>6</sup>, then of the letters "suls", "naqsh", "nastaliq".

The surface of the rings is small and no long words are written on them. They are mostly short quotations from the Quran, Zikr, supplications, names of Allah, the Prophet and his relatives, and various saints and Shiite imams. In Safavid Persia, however, large carnelian inscriptions with graceful long carvings in small script appear from the 18th century onwards<sup>7</sup>. Such inscriptions may contain a whole surah (chapter) or several verses from the Quran.

Certain types of rings are represented by seals with "magic squares" - rectangles divided into sectors by numbers. Such ornaments are found everywhere from Morocco to India.

Rings were sometimes used as dishes. The beautiful emeralds have a special place beneath them that is poisoned. When rulers lost their enemies in this way, some spies or court ladies used them for protection when they found themselves in an inconvenient situation.

Sealed rings decorated with decorative and magical inscriptions were especially popular in Persia, and this tradition has survived to this day in modern Iran. In Iran, a whole system of numerical ciphers of various words from the Quran was developed to save space and give out a unique secret. For example,

<sup>2</sup> Фахретдинова Д. А. Ювелирное искусство Узбекистана. / Д. А. Фахретдинова —Ташкент. : Издательство лит. и искусства. 1988. — 60-61 с.

<sup>3</sup> An overview on the history of ornaments and jewelry in Iran. / — Tehran: National Museum of Iran, 2013 — 28 p.

<sup>4</sup> Alfred Janata. Schmuck in Afghanistan. / Janata A. — Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, 1981. — 124-125 s

<sup>5</sup> Сычева Н. С. Ювелирные украшения народов Средней Азии и Казахстана XIX-XX веков из собрания Государственного музея искусства народов Востока. / Н. С. Сычева — М.: «Советский художник». 1984 — 114 с.

<sup>6</sup> Фахретдинова Д. А. Ювелирное искусство Узбекистана. / Д. А. Фахретдинова —Ташкент. : Издательство лит. и искусства. 1988. — 62-63 с

<sup>7</sup> Anne van Cusem. A World of Rings. Africa, Asia, America. / Cusem Anne van. — Milano: Scira Editore S.p.A., 2000 — 86-87 p

the number 876 means "in the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Merciful" (bismillah), sometimes these numbers are put before the beginning of a short surah from the Quran to save space. Later poems by Persian poets in the elegant and concise manuscript "nasta'liq" were and still are widely used to this day.

The ring of Amir Temur, who founded the great empire in the 15th century, is a remarkable example of jewelry art of that time. The patterns on the ring's rim are also Arabic inscriptions on the edges, and the ring's eye is made of nephrite and sealed on the nephrite surface. The words "Power in Justice" are engraved on it. Before the body of Amir Temur, who died during his campaign to China in 1405, was sent to Samarkand, Saraymulkhanum, Amir Shohmalik and Amir Sheikh Nuriddin had sent Amir Temur's ring that was depicted empire's official seal on it, sword, and his horse to the capital city of Herat - to his son Shahrukh Mirza. After the death of Shahrukh Mirza, the ring, long "extinct," suddenly found itself in the hands of Hussein Boykaro. The ring would not be taken from him during his funeral after his death. In 1965, at the invitation of the the king of Afghanistan, Boykaro's tomb was opened and scholars presented the ring to King Muhammad Zahirshah. His nephew Muhammad Daoud sold the ring to the U.S. Metropolitan Museum of Art after the 1973 coup. The ring with the seal is now at the U.S. Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Today, the tradition of wearing rings and rings persists in North Africa and West Asia, especially in countries where men are Muslim. Men usually wear one ring on their little finger, ring finger or middle finger, and in some cases two or three rings at the same time.

**Conclusions and suggestions.** Unfortunately, in the era of globalization, the production of jewelry is less and less connected with manual labor: instead of single items with the style and handwriting of an experienced master, serial and faceless items are increasingly made, even manufactured. This is nothing less than jewelry made from precious materials. It is more important to study the traditions of applied art of the ancient period and to maintain knowledge of the artistic treatment of materials in different periods.

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