



Rings: Symbols of Wealth, Power and Affection

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Diana Scarisbrick

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Rings are unique among personal adornments: none other carries such a weight of symbolism. Rings can be enjoyed for themselves as objects of beauty; but equally fascinating are the meanings that have been attached to them. With rings, lovers and wedded couples pledged their faith, kings and popes exercised their power, noblemen displayed their lineage, merchants marked their goods. Rings warned their wearers to meditate on salvation; commemorated the dead; proclaimed loyalties. Almost every example awakens a human story to life. To her history of rings from the Middle Ages to modern times, Diana Scarisbrick brings an unequalled knowledge of remarkable treasures in museums, private collections and salerooms. She notes the choice of specific gems, the role of the goldsmith, and changes in taste, design and attitudes; and she unravels the iconography of rings. Memoirs, inventories and imaginative literature, together with contemporary portraits, illuminate the social context. Rings of significance and rings for show, rings that have adorned the fingers of Richard Coeur-de-Lion and the Duchess of Windsor all are described, explained and illustrated in enlargements that convey the excitement of handling the jewels themselves. Infinitely precious yet unobtrusive, personal and enigmatic, rings still speak to us in a language that defies time. Diana Scarisbrick is an art historian specializing in the history of jewelry and engraved gems. She has curated exhibitions on jewelry at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, and the Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge. She writes a monthly jewellery column for "Harpers and Queen" magazine, and contributes regularly to "Country Life", "Apollo" and "The Burlington Magazine".

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