



Medieval Bishop's Ring Set With A Sapphire. English, 12th - 13th Century.

18 800 EUR



Period : Before 16th century

Condition : Etat d'usage

Material : Gold

Description

A Medieval Bishop's Ring Set with a Sapphire, Rubies, and Emeralds. English, 12th - 13th century. Ring size P 1/2 UK / 8 US / 57 EU. Weighs 1.9 grams. The bezel measures 1.3 x 1.3cm. A finely crafted ecclesiastical ring of the High Middle Ages, the central square cabochon sapphire is set in a closed-back collet bezel, flanked on each side by four smaller cabochon gemstones--two emeralds and two garnets--each within individual collet settings. The stones are arranged symmetrically, creating a richly coloured and harmonious design typical of high-status medieval devotional jewellery. The ring is mounted to a narrow, flat-section hoop. Condition: The top ruby setting has been repaired and there is a small fracture to the top of the sapphires setting, expected due to the age and

Dealer

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fragility of the ring. Provenance:From a private English collection, assembled between the 1960s and 1990s. ? Historical Context:In the medieval period, gemstones were imbued with symbolic and apotropaic significance. They were believed to offer protection from evil, illness, or poison, and to reflect or enhance the virtues of the wearer. Sapphires, in particular, were associated with purity, chastity, and divine wisdom, and were therefore commonly worn by bishops and high-ranking clergy. A sapphire's reputed ability to change colour in response to sin or lack of faith lent it further power as a symbol of honesty and spiritual devotion. Rings of this form--distinguished by a central cabochon sapphire surrounded by smaller satellite stones--can be confidently dated to the late 12th to early 13th century. They are strongly linked with episcopal authority and have been recovered from a number of clerical burials. ? Comparable Examples: 1. The Ring of Walter de Gray, Archbishop of York (1215-1255):Discovered during the 1967-68 restoration of his tomb in York Minster. The ring, set with a sapphire and surrounded by rubies and emeralds, is now displayed in the undercroft of the cathedral.

Reference:

<https://yorkminster.org/digital-undercroft/> 2.

The Bishop of Chichester's Ring (c. 12th century):Unearthed during the opening of two bishops' coffins at Chichester Cathedral in 1829, this ring features an octagonal sapphire with four emerald satellites.An engraving by Thomas King (c.1830, Ref: 46837i) illustrates the tombs and associated objects.

Reference:

<https://wellcomecollection.org/works/wctmjygf/images?id=pfp39ypn> 3. The Whithorn Priory Ring:Recovered from a bishop's grave, this ring is set with an oblong table-cut amethyst surrounded by eight small sapphires.

Reference:

<https://nms.scran.ac.uk/database/record.php?usi=000-100-047-884-C&searchdb=scran&scache=1&guh7fv1&PHPSESSID=2rgagfg9nvf452jieg2g03irq3> 4. Victoria and Albert Museum

(Accession No. M.183-1962):A similar ring dated to the early 14th century, found in Durham and formerly in the Philip Nelson Collection. Reference:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121925/ring-unknown/>

5. Victoria and Albert Museum

(Accession No. M.7-1929):Another comparable

ring, larger and dated to c.1250-1300. Reference:

<https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O121873/ring-unknown/>

6. Noonan's Auction, London (26

March 2025):A closely related example sold as

Lot 88 in the 'Jewellery, Silver & Objects of

Vertu' auction for £19,000 (plus 24% buyer's

premium). Reference:

<https://www.noonans.co.uk/auctions/archive/past-catalogues/808/catalogue/984073/?offset=80> ?

Literature: o Oman, C.: British Rings,

800-1914, B.T. Batsford Ltd., pp. 20, 47, 94, 96;

Plates 16D, 18G, and 19A & E (including rings

formerly in the collection of Dame Joan Evans,

now in the Victoria and Albert Museum). o

Waterton, E.: Episcopal Rings, The

Archaeological Journal, Vol. 20, 1863, pp.

235-236, fig. 8. ?