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### The Cultural Significance of Precious Stones in Early Modern England

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THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PRECIOUS STONES  
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

by

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A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Arts

Major: History

Under the Supervision of Professor Carole Levin

Lincoln, Nebraska

June, 2011

# THE CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PRECIOUS STONES

## IN EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

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University of Nebraska, 2011

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Sixteenth and seventeenth century sources reveal that precious stones served a number of important functions in Elizabethan and early Stuart society. The beauty and rarity of certain precious stones made them ideal additions to fashion and dress of the day. These stones also served political purposes when flaunted as examples of a country's wealth, bestowed as favors, or even worn as a show of royal support.

Lapidaries and medical texts advised readers to use stones in myriad ways ranging from the subtle and common, to the bizarre and mystical.

Stones and gems are excellent tools for studying diverse aspects of the cultural history of a society. A close examination of the gems people owned, how they were used, and what people thought about them reveals those circumstances and processes whereby an ordinary object becomes special or precious because of its investment with particular meanings and values. From this cultural perspective, the precious stones provide a means to an end; a way to resurrect thoughts, feelings, emotions, and other intangible threads that once interwoven, bond together a rich comprehension of a society. An understanding of precious stones gives us a unique insight into the motivations, aspirations, fears, and dreams that embodied Elizabethan and early Stuart society.

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INTRODUCTION:  
A PRISM INTO EARLY MODERN CULTURE

“[The gem] is called precious,  
for that it is rare:  
all things that be rare are precious.  
Neither is it to be marveiled  
why eche Gem is precious,  
sith that all and singuler are not  
without their divine vertue.”<sup>1</sup>

Embellishing clothing with jewels, purchasing a gemstone for its supposed health benefits, or pawning jewelry in exchange for cash does not immediately bring to mind a connection with early modern society. Yet, these tasks were very real in the daily lives of sixteenth and seventeenth century individuals, and contemporary sources reveal that precious stones served important functions in Elizabethan and early Stuart society. The beauty and rarity of some precious stones made them ideal additions to the fashion and dress of the day. These stones also served political purposes when flaunted as examples of a country's wealth, bestowed as favors, or even worn as a show of royal support. The supposed medical and magical properties of precious stones documented from ancient and medieval sources were well known throughout English society and widely subscribed to by monarchs and commoners alike.

Stones and gems are excellent tools for studying diverse aspects of the cultural history of a society. As part of the material culture circulating in early modern society, precious stones formed a central part of the everyday experiences of individuals. In the introduction of his edited collection *The Social Life of Things*, anthropologist Arjun

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<sup>1</sup> John Maplet, *A greene forest, or A naturall historie vwherein may bee seene first the most sufferaigne vertues in all the whole kinde of stones & mettals: next of plants, as of herbes, trees, [and] shrubs, lastly of brute beastes, foules, fishes, creeping wormes [and] serpents, and that alphabetically: so that a table shall not neede.* (London, 1567), 9.

Appadurai asserts, “Commodities, like persons, have social lives.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, examining the social life of material goods is important for the historian, social scientist, archaeologist and anthropologist because objects derive their meaning and efficacy from the economic, social and psychological motivations of individuals within a society.<sup>3</sup> Often this meaning derives from what people project onto the object. In the case of precious stones, this could be associations with medical and magical properties, signifiers of social relations, or identification with currency. As well as examining the meanings with which humans encode objects, Appadurai argues that to further illuminate the social context of things “we have to follow the things themselves, for their meanings are inscribed in their forms, their uses, their trajectories. It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things.”<sup>4</sup> Therefore, through the study of objects, scholars are able to reconcile the material and socio-cultural dimensions of human activity.

The aim of this thesis is to offer a new perspective on the circulation of objects, specifically precious stones, in early modern English society. A wealth of evidence from lapidaries, state papers, personal journals, and jewelry inventories reveals that stones and gems influenced the spheres of magic, medicine, politics and fashion. A close study of the gems people owned, how they were used, and what people thought about them reveals those circumstances and processes whereby an ordinary object becomes special or

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<sup>2</sup> Arjun Appadurai, “Introduction: commodities and the politics of value,” in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 3.

<sup>3</sup> For further work on the study of material culture in early modern England see Lena Orlin Cowen, *Material London ca. 1600* (Philadelphia, PA, 2000) and Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendour: Society and Culture in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2005). For a multi-disciplinary analysis of a variety of material goods in pre-modern Europe see Tara Hamlin and Catherine Richardson, *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and its Meanings* (Burlington, VT and Surrey, England, 2010).

<sup>4</sup> Appadurai, *The Social Life*, 5.

precious because of its investment with particular meanings and values. From this cultural perspective, the precious stones provide a means to an end; a way to resurrect thoughts, feelings, emotions, and other intangible threads that once interwoven, bond together a rich comprehension of a society. An understanding of precious stones gives us a unique insight into the motivations, aspirations, fears, and dreams that embodied Elizabethan and early Stuart society.

Much of the scholarship on precious stones from the first decades of the twentieth century function more like reference works than academic monographs. Authors like W.T. Fernie and Julius Wodiska, writing in 1907 and 1910 respectively, divided their books alphabetically by stone, with a focus on the more rare and precious gems. Fernie's work focuses exclusively on the "occult powers" of precious gems and the "physical virtues" that gems can exercise on behalf of their owner.<sup>5</sup> The virtues he describes are exclusively concerned with magical and medicinal properties that have been attributed to stones by past cultures. Thus, Fernie's foray into the history of stones makes his work useful as a reference for primary sources that touch upon stones. Wodiska, on the other hand, provides an account of each stone's scientific, commercial, artistic, and historical aspects. Much of this information is a valuable reference tool for the budding gemologist or mineralogist; however, the small historical vignettes he includes do provide useful information to the historian regarding the origins of some of the stones.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> W.T. Fernie, *Precious Stones for Curative Wear and Other Redial Uses* (Bristol: John Wright and Co., 1907), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Julius Wodiska, *A Book of Precious Stones: the identification of gems and gem minerals, and an account of their scientific, commercial, and historical aspects* (New York and London: The Knickerbocker Press, 1910), 4.

Writing over a decade later, in 1913, George Frederick Kunz published his seminal work titled *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones*. A companion piece followed two years later that specifically focused on magical gems and jewels. Through these works, Kunz furthers the research explored by Fernie and offers a much more comprehensive look at the “supernatural” history of stones as recorded in lapidaries and numerous literary, scientific and philosophical texts throughout the ages and spanning a variety of civilizations. In both books, Kunz illustrates the various ways in which precious stones were used by past civilizations and describes the values and properties that have formed in association with gems and stones.<sup>7</sup> Again, as with the works above, Kunz treats each stone on an individual basis and in alphabetical order. Given the ambitious nature of his project, he also organizes his books by category, devoting specific chapters to certain types of stones (i.e., engraved gems, luminous gems, and birth stones).

Following on the heels of Kunz, Joan Evans published a book on magical jewels in 1922. Her research deals exclusively with the lapidary tradition that formed around the study of stones. Lapidaries were treatises that recorded the virtues and properties of precious stones and often functioned as the medical textbooks of a given time period. Thus, rather than offer an alphabetical list of gems that was prevalent in the works of earlier scholars, Evans presents her research in chronological order by lapidary. Despite her focus on lapidaries this text in many respects is a shortened version of Kunz’ work.

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<sup>7</sup> George Frederick Kunz. *The Curious Lore of Precious Stones: Being a description of their sentiments and folklore, superstitions, symbolism, mysticism, use in medicine, protection, prevention, religion, and divination; crystal gazing, birthstones, lucky stones and talismans, astral, zodiacal, and planetary* (Philadelphia and London: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1913), v.



She focuses primarily on the history of “magical jewellery” in England during the Middle Ages and the Renaissance and only briefly touches upon the medicinal virtues of gems.<sup>8</sup>

Although the works by Fernie, Wodiska, Kunz and Evans provide a rich vein of material relating to precious stones, these texts largely center upon the magical and medicinal qualities of precious stones, and more specifically their uses as talismans and amulets. Throughout their texts, the authors make numerous references to the “occult powers”, “superstitions”, and “magical” virtues associated with stones. However, many of the cultures described in these works did not view the properties they attributed to gems as strictly magical. Rather, many ancient, medieval, and early modern societies based their understanding of stones and the powers they manifested upon astrological knowledge. For example, many civilizations believed that the stars and heavens not only influenced the lives of man, but also affected the virtues of other natural forms. Thus, a stone could be affected by celestial forces, thereby strengthening or weakening its natural properties. Religious beliefs also provided an explanation for how a stone received its powers. Many Christian civilizations believed that because a stone came from nature, and God created the natural world, He was also responsible for investing stones with their virtues.

Although these early scholars created works that situate precious stones within a broad historical context spanning several civilizations, for the most part their books largely reproduce ancient and medieval lapidaries and scientific treatises written by physicians, astrologers, and philosophers. While this information is useful for providing insight into the types of stones known to pre-modern cultures and as a way of tracing

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<sup>8</sup> Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, particularly in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 25.

through time the transmission of their purported magical and medicinal properties, gems also participated in other aspects of society. Indeed, while Fernie, Wodiska, Kunz and Evans highlight the magical and medical folklore of precious stones throughout history, these same stones also played significant roles in the religion, politics, literature and art of many societies. Ultimately, these authors offer a narrative of what they consider the superstitions surrounding precious stones rather than an analysis of why societies felt compelled to ascribe virtues to these stones and what the uses of these stones can tell us about the beliefs and practices of these cultures.

A new trend emerges in the literature of gems and stones beginning in the late 1970s and continuing up to the present. Rather than large reference works of stones listed alphabetically or chronologically by source, scholars began evaluating stones from the perspective of a specific academic discipline. A literary critique published in 1977 by Abby Jane Dubman Hansen examines the significance of gems in several of Shakespeare's plays. Hansen suggests that by situating Shakespeare's images of precious stones into the "magical lapidary tradition" and understanding the lore that surrounded these stones during Shakespeare's time we will not only enhance our readings of his gem images, but also influence our interpretations of the plays.<sup>9</sup> Through her research, Hansen shows that the uses or roles given to stones in Shakespeare's plays suggest the playwright's knowledge of contemporary beliefs in the magical and medicinal uses of gems. Similar to the works by Kunz and Evans, Hansen draws upon lapidaries from the Renaissance to provide information on the properties of specific gems found in Shakespeare's plays. She uses this to show that once we know the lore behind the stones

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<sup>9</sup> Abby Jane Dubman Hansen, "Shakespeare and the Lore of Precious Stones" *College Literature* 4, no. 3 (Fall, 1977): 210.

it makes sense why Shakespeare referenced them as he did. Furthermore, she suggests that regardless of whether or not Shakespeare believed in a stone's power he certainly had access to the "numerous popular and scholarly sources that preserved the traditional lore in detail."<sup>10</sup> She proceeds to give examples of some of the sources he might have seen over the course of his career.

Although this article, like earlier scholarship, continues the focus of stones on their magical and medicinal virtues, Hansen's work improves upon the earlier works by drawing a connection between the lapidaries and their influence in early modern English literature. Furthermore, Hansen suggests the allusion to these stones in Shakespeare's plays further demonstrates how well known the lore of precious stones must have been to both Shakespeare and his audience.<sup>11</sup> Given that Shakespeare was known to use a multitude of sources in the fashioning of his plays it is not unlikely that he had access to a lapidary or other work that described the virtues of stones. In addition, a person did not have to be literate in early modern England in order to know of a stone's power. Because so many of the virtues attributed to stones were of a medicinal or magical nature, many stones would have been used as treatments for a variety of ills. These remedies were often transmitted by word of mouth from physician to patient, family member to family member and friend-to-friend. Thus, it is very likely that many of the people making up Shakespeare's audience would have known some of the properties associated with precious gems.

Much of the modern scholarship dealing with the significance of stones in the history of jewelry and art has been published since the mid-1990s. Diana Scarisbrick is

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<sup>10</sup> Hansen, "Shakespeare," 210.

<sup>11</sup> Hansen, "Shakespeare," 211.

the forerunner in scholarship focused on jewelry. Her seminal work titled *Jewellery in Britain, 1066-1837* is a documentary, social, literary, and artistic survey of jewelry that examines the different ways jewels were made and worn for ceremonial and personal use in Britain from the Norman Conquest up until the Victorian age. In addition to extending the work of earlier scholars by incorporating jewelry and art into her research, Scarisbrick is the first author to emphasize the importance of precious stones within a social context. She examines stones not only within a magical and medicinal framework but also from a social, economic, and political perspective. For example, she discusses the types of jewelry worn by various classes of society, the techniques, designs and motifs that were popular at certain times and how jewelry was influenced by changes in social customs and style.<sup>12</sup>

Although Scarisbrick does an admirable job of examining the relationship of jewelry as it fits into the nexus of public and private life, she falls short, as do the previous works mentioned, in that none of them attempt to address why stones acquired certain attributes within a society. While there may indeed have been a fascination with the powers attributed to stones, there was also a deeper association with the properties of stones than past scholarship suggests. Indeed, many of the healing virtues of gems addressed diseases and illnesses prevalent during the Renaissance. This is significant given that medical treatment could not be afforded by all people and even if one could afford it chances for recovery from a serious illness were small. Other properties of gems were known to protect against bewitching and poisoning. Given the strong fear of

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<sup>12</sup> Diana Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain, 1066-1837* (Great Britain: Michael Russell Publishing, 1994), 124.

witchcraft during the Renaissance, it is not surprising that several stones became known for their efficacy against matters of the occult.

As evidenced, modern scholarship on the cultural significance of gems and stones throughout history varies greatly in style and content. While each of the scholars mentioned above offers insight into the history of stones and their broader cultural significance as magical charms and jewels of ornamentation, few scholars attempt to place the stones within their specific cultural and social context as a way to reconstruct the patterns of meanings, attitudes and values shared by members of a society. Studying stones and gems from this perspective will not only allow for historians to focus on how the world was represented and perceived in a society, but also how the society functioned and how it was physically or emotionally experienced.

CHAPTER 1:  
A STONE FOR HEALTH OR HEX

Many people in early modern England deeply believed in the magical properties of precious stones as evidenced by the numerous lapidaries and astrological works published on the topic. Even shopkeepers recognized the trend and both provincial and metropolitan shops provided a listing of birthstones and astrological charms that were guaranteed to benefit the wearer.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, there was a certain inexplicable aspect in a rare, strange, or exceptionally beautiful stone that lent it an air of mystery and the potential for magic. The belief in a stone's magical ability relied on the close link existing between magic and astrology. Common belief during the early modern period held that the planets and stars had power over the lives of men and women, thus a stone (also of nature and God's creation) was influenced by the stars and planets. According to Reginald Scot in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft* published in 1584, "Stones receive their vertues altogether of the planets and heavenlie bodies, and have not onelie the verie operation of the planets, but sometimes the verie images and impressions of the stares naturallie ingrafted in them."<sup>2</sup> Similarly, a sixteenth century translated edition of Franciscan friar Anglicus Bartholomaeus' lapidary *De Proprietatibus Rerum* states, "Stones be diuers in vertue and in kinde: For influence of heuenly vertue commeth into their places, and putteth therein the effects therof, and after as it findeth matter more able and obedient to his working, the more noble impression it printeth therein. Therefore precious stones follow vertues of kinde of Planets on effect and working."<sup>3</sup>

One strong believer in the supernatural influences of precious stones was Simon Forman.

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<sup>1</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Jewellery* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1973), 14.

<sup>2</sup> Reginald Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft* (London, 1584), 297.

<sup>3</sup> Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum* (London, 1582), 264.

He was an astrologer and physician in sixteenth and early seventeenth century England who penned copious notes concerning medicine, astrology, alchemy and magic. Though not formally trained, Forman began practicing medicine in the late 1570s and in 1592 he established a practice dedicated to astrological medicine in London. People flocked to request his services for various reasons including treatment of illness, and for help with lost property and missing persons.<sup>4</sup>

Forman believed stones received power from the stars and used his knowledge of astrology to make amulets (an object worn about the person as a protection or charm to ward off danger) for friends and clients.<sup>5</sup> In February 1599, he even made an amulet for himself in the form of a gold ring with a large coral stone in the center. He engraved the coral with the sign of Jupiter as this was the ruling planet at the time he made the ring and would have infused the jewel with luck. A piece of paper containing Forman's name, date of birth, and the symbols for the astrological house of Virgo and its ruling planet Mercury was wedged underneath the coral. The inscriptions of Virgo and Mercury represent the ascendant or rising signs at the time of Forman's birth, in December 1552, and would have provided a positive influence on his physical appearance and overall health. He wore this ring on the little finger of his left hand and believed it protected him from witchcraft as well as giving him "favor and credit and to make one famous in his profession and to overcome enemies."<sup>6</sup>

Although early modern society attributed protective properties to each individual stone, they also believed that putting several stones together in a ring, pendant or brooch provided greater safety to an individual. Even though stones were empowered by

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<sup>4</sup> Carole Levin, *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 57.

<sup>5</sup> OED Online. March 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://0-www.oed.com.library.unl.edu/view/Entry/6778?redirectedFrom=amulet> (accessed Feb 13, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Sloane Manuscript 3822, fo. II. London, British Library in Lauren Kassell, *Medicine and Magic in Elizabethan London, Simon Forman: Astrologer, Alchemist, and Physician* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 222.

celestial influences, the magic did not come from the stone alone. Rather, the stone was an instrument of God or of a good or evil spirit that accomplished the supernatural through the stone.<sup>7</sup> As Scot claims in his *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, a sign or image called a sigil was often inscribed on the back of jewels as an added defense against evil since stones “through the operation of the planets whereunto they are addicted...may gather the greater force of their working.”<sup>8</sup> The added source of power a stone received from its sigil, however, only lasted as long as the constellation for which it was inscribed was favorably situated in the sky. As well as celestial sigils for infusing the stone with power, the names of God, Christ, and the Virgin were also common inscriptions to ward off enchantments and evil spirits.<sup>9</sup>

Many stones valued for their magical ability were set in metal with the back of the jewel remaining open in order for the magic to pass easily from the stone directly onto the skin. For example, an extant enameled gold pendant from the mid-sixteenth century set with a large peridot, a garnet, and a tear-shaped sapphire drop has a back that remains open for this purpose.<sup>10</sup> The stone, however, was not the only part of the jewel believed to possess magical properties. Indeed, the metal surrounding the jewel had inherent virtues of its own. In the early modern period, gold was the common metal used as a setting for stones. According to Bartholomaeus’ lapidary, “among mettall is nothing so effectuall in vertue, as golde ... for it hath vertue to comfort, and for to cleanse superfluities gathered in bodies: and therefore it helpeth against leprosie.” He also notes

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Evans, *Magical Jewels of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Particularly in England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1922), 152.

<sup>8</sup> Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 298.

<sup>9</sup> Armstrong, *Jewellery*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> This pendant is preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum. Diana Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837: A Documentary, Social, Literary, and Artistic Survey* (Norwich: Michael Russell Ltd., 1994), 107.



that gold helps prevent “cardiac passion” and works “against many other evils and passions melancholike.”<sup>11</sup> Even the College of Physician’s *Pharmacopoeia*, the standard medical text for physicians and apothecaries, recognized the virtues of gold: “Gold is temperate in quality, it wonderfully strengthens the heart and vital spirits ... it resists melancholly, faintings, swoonings, feavers, falling-sickness, and all such like infirmitie incident, either to the vital or animal spirit.”<sup>12</sup> Apparently, Queen Elizabeth was not immune to believing in the restorative properties of gold. According to the diary of Elizabeth Southwell, a maid of honor to the Queen, Vice Chamberlain Sir John Stanhope presented Elizabeth with “a piece of gold of the bignes of an angell full of Characters” that an “old woman in Wales bequethed her on her death bed.” Stanhope told the Queen how “the said old woman by vertue of the same lived to the age of 120 yeares and being in that age having all her bodie wethered and consumed, and wanting nature to nourish she died commanding the said piece of gold to be carefully sent her maj<sup>tie</sup> alleging further that as long as the said old woman wore yt upon her bodie she could not die. The queene upon the confidence she had hereof toke the said gold and wore yt about her neck.”<sup>13</sup>

Just as an understanding of astrology helped Forman infuse his amulets with magic so too will an understanding of the magical properties of precious stones aid the modern historian in recognizing common anxieties and fears encountered by individuals during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. One such fear was that of infidelity. Early modern society was greatly concerned with the sexual decorum of its members,

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<sup>11</sup> Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 254.

<sup>12</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A physycall directory, or, A translation of the London dispensatory made by the Colledge of Physicians in London*. (London: 1649), 74.

<sup>13</sup> Catherine Loomis, “Elizabeth Southwell’s Manuscript Account of the Death of Queen Elizabeth [with text]” in *English Literary Renaissance* 26, no. 3, Article first published online: 21 SEP 2010: 484-85.

specifically the female portion. During this period society was patriarchal in nature and its women were expected to be chaste, silent, and obedient. Therefore, a woman who transgressed in any way endangered her virtue and the honor of her family, both of which affected social positions. Furthermore, if an adulterous woman became pregnant not only would the sexual transgression soon be visible to the public, but her lascivious behavior also threatened the inheritance of wealth.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, this would be of special concern for noble and aristocratic families who gained power through succession.

Many people in early modern England believed, however, that certain stones could reveal an individual's unfaithfulness. Early modern lapidaries recommended that sapphires and emeralds were very effective stones for detecting adulterers. Indeed, the sapphire would lose its splendor and an emerald would break if it touched the skin of an adulterer.<sup>15</sup> For discovering an unfaithful wife, Bartholomaeus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* describes the diamond as particularly useful. According to his lapidary, if a diamond "be prively layd under a womans head that slepeth, her husband may know whether that she be chast, or no: For if she be chast by vertue of the stone, she is compelled in her sleepe to imbrace her husband: and if she be untrue, shee leapeth from him out of the bed, as one that is unworthy to abide the presence of that stone."<sup>16</sup> Just as Bartholomaeus' work remarks specifically on the fidelity of women, another sixteenth century lapidary by French humanist Pierre Boaistuau makes the same connection. Boaistuau's *Certaine Secret Wonders of Nature*, translated into English in 1569, links the emerald to a woman's chastity. In his treatise, the emerald "is a special friend to chastity." He uses as

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<sup>14</sup> Sid Ray, "Those Whom God Hath Joined Together: Bondage Metaphors and Marital Advice in Early Modern England," in *Domestic Arrangements in Early Modern England*, ed Kari Boyd McBride (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2002), 42.

<sup>15</sup> Thomas Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea* (London, 1653), 85, 96.

<sup>16</sup> Bartholomaeus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, 256.

an example the experience of the King of Hungary “who lying with his wife, and hauing an Emeraud on his finger, maruelled to sée it breake and conuert to many péces.”

According to Boaistuau, the breaking of the emerald signified the wife’s infidelity.<sup>17</sup>

These treatises’ similarities in linking a stone’s power to reveal adultery specifically in instances involving women is not surprising given the cultural attitudes surrounding women during the early modern period. During this period women were ascribed a position in society based upon dominant patriarchal views that came from classical and religious sources addressing the nature of the female sex. These views in turn aided in the formation of prescribed gender roles that formed early modern English societal notions of the ideal woman. This ideal female was a woman who exhibited the virtues of obedience, piety, chastity, and silence. These virtues, however, were the ideal and the male half of society greatly feared female disobedience to male authority.<sup>18</sup> This disobedience could take the form of sexual insubordination, thus the power attributed to precious stones for determining fidelity in a wife attests to the early modern anxiety surrounding the sexual nature of women.

Early modern lapidaries reveal that a few stones (and some of the most sought after) were of particular interest because they protected against witchcraft, a very real fear affecting monarchs and courtiers down to the poorest yeoman. Early modern society did not view witches as harmless magical practitioners dabbling in the occult. Rather, witches were members of a demonic, anti-Christian sect that threatened both religious

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<sup>17</sup> Pierre Boaistuau, *Certaine secrete wonders of nature containing a descriptio[n] of sundry strange things, seming monstrous in our eyes and iudgement, bicause we are not priuie to the reasons of them*. Trans. E. Fenton. (London: 1569), 41.

<sup>18</sup> Sara Mendelson and Patricia Crawford, *Women in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 62.

and social order.<sup>19</sup> William Perkins, an early modern English theologian, sums up this view in his treatise on witchcraft. According to Perkins, the witch is “the most notorious traytor and rebel that can be . . . . For shee renounceth God himself, the king of kings, shee leaves the societie of his church and people, shee bindeth herself in league with the devil.”<sup>20</sup> The common theory of the day claimed that witches made a demonic pact in which they renounced God and gave their soul to the devil in return for the power to do harm. Early modern society believed this harmful magic, or *maleficium*, practiced by witches caused illness or death of people as well as destruction of livestock and crops. Furthermore, the witch could work this malevolent magic without having to touch a person; through a muttered curse, a threatening gesture, or even a baleful stare the witch practiced her craft.<sup>21</sup>

While there were formal counter actions that involved trials and prosecution, there were also informal measures people utilized to deal with witchcraft. Such measures included scratching a witch to draw blood or burning thatch from a witch’s roof, both actions people believed were effective at destroying the witch’s power over her victim.<sup>22</sup> Stones were another tool thought to be useful not only at breaking a witch’s hold over her victim but also for preventing a bewitchment. Several early modern works suggest diamonds and coral as being especially effective at preventing bewitching and driving away evil spirits and demons. For example, coral hung around the necks of children drove away “childish feares” and “divells,” and protected the wearer from “fascination or

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<sup>19</sup> James Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England* (Harlow, England: Pearson Education, 2001), 4.

<sup>20</sup> William Perkins, *A discourse of the damned art of witchcraft so farre forth as it is reuealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience* (Cambridge, 1608), 248-9.

<sup>21</sup> Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 40.

<sup>22</sup> Sharpe, *Witchcraft in Early Modern England*, 53.

bewitching.”<sup>23</sup> Bartholomaeus describes a stone called eliotropia (also known as heliotrope or bloodstone) that “is a precious stone, and is greene and sprong with red droppes and veines of the coulour of bloud.” He claims that this stone “discovereth the soil of inchauntenes of witches, that have liking and pride in their owne wonders, for they beguile mens sight in those thinges that they worke.” Furthermore, a person that “beareth this stone maye not [be] beguiled.” Bartholomaeus also cautions his readers to be wary of witches who have a sapphire in their possession for “witches love well this stone, for they wéen [believe] that they may work certain wonders by vertue of this stone.”<sup>24</sup> He does not describe what the witch hoped to accomplish by using the sapphire; however, we can speculate as to how the witch may have found the stone useful given the properties it possessed. Bartholomaeus explains that the sapphire is so noble and so excellent, it is called “*Gemma gemmarum*, as it [is] chiefe of precious stones,” for it “kéepeth and saueth lims whole & sound” and has the abilities to “make peace & accord,” ... “cooleth heate of the body within,” ... “helpeth against much feauers,” and “hath vertue to staunch bloud.”<sup>25</sup> While these virtues are positive attributes associated with the sapphire, in the hands of a witch who practices *maleficium* it may not have been difficult for early modern society to believe a witch is able to reverse the virtues of the stone to work against another person. For example, rather than use the sapphire to make peace she causes strife, instead of relieving a fever and stopping bleeding, she might make the symptoms worse with the aid of the stone.

Interestingly, early modern belief held that diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds (four of the most sought after precious gems) were the best stones against

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<sup>23</sup> Robert Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy* (London, 1621), 442; Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 294.

<sup>24</sup> Bartholomaeus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, 260, 265.

<sup>25</sup> Bartholomaeus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, 294.

poison. According to Nicols, a sapphire had “so contrary a nature to poysons, that if it be put into a glasse with a Spider, or laid upon the mouth of the glasse where the Spider is, the Spider will quickly die.”<sup>26</sup> Just as effective were rubies and emeralds. A ruby, worn in an amulet or crushed and mixed into a drink, prevented poisoning. For an emerald, a person only needed “six grains of its powder in convenient water” for the stone to be “good against poisons.”<sup>27</sup> Ingesting a diamond was not necessary for the stone to act as a poison detector. According to Bartholomaeus, the stone “borne in the left shoulder, or in the left arme pit” worked externally to “warneth of venime.”<sup>28</sup> Whether the poisoning resulted from the bite of an animal, the ingestion of a particular food or through the evil workings of a witch, poisoning was a genuine concern for those in early modern England. Moreover, the etiology of many diseases went unknown due to the rudimentary medical knowledge of the period leading many physicians and caretakers to ascribe poison as the cause of an illness. Therefore, coming up with methods to prevent, detect, or remove poison from a person was extremely important during the period. The inherent beauty of diamonds, sapphires, emeralds and rubies and their scarcity in nature led to their high demand within society. This beauty and rarity added to these stones’ perceived power, thereby heightening their natural virtues in the minds of early modern society. Thus, the properties society believed these gems received from the Heavens would naturally be powerful and given the anxiety toward poison during the period, it comes as no surprise that these most precious of stones became ideal weapons for combating poison.

Several other stones were valued for their poison detecting abilities and were often easier to procure than the sparkling gems mentioned above. While not considered

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<sup>26</sup> Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea*, 85.

<sup>27</sup> Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea*, 58, 96.

<sup>28</sup> Bartholomaeus, *De Proprietatibus Rerum*, 255.

“precious” gems by modern standards the bezoar stone and unicorn’s horn were highly prized by individuals in early modern society. Societal belief held that these stones could detect poison and in some cases cure an individual suffering from poison. Although referred to as a stone, bezoars were actually solid mineral masses from the intestines of ruminant animals such as goats, sheep and deer. Believed to be an antidote to poison, a piece of bezoar reportedly belonged to Queen Elizabeth. She owned a “Besore stone sett in golde hanging at a little Bracelett of a flagon Chayne. The most parte of this stone spent.”<sup>29</sup> That part of the stone was “spent” suggests that the Queen occasionally took advantage of the antidote.

Unlike bezoar stone, unicorn’s horn (really the ivory tusk of a marine mammal called the narwhal) was a poison detector rather than an antidote. Sixteenth century Englishman Edward Webbe explains the lore surrounding the purifying power of the unicorn’s horn in his travel narrative: “Oliphants together with many other wilde and tame beastes will not drinke of any water vntill the Unicornes doe begin therof: these Unicornes when they come to drinke of any riuer, they put in their horne which is blackish and but short: and forth of that water will rise a great skum, and thereby clense all the filth and corruption that is within the same.”<sup>30</sup> Due to the belief in the horn’s ability to cleanse water of impurities, many people in early modern society attributed poison detecting abilities to the unicorn’s horn. In fact, faith in the horn’s ability was so great that people bequeathed their pieces to family members. For example, in his will Sir

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<sup>29</sup> British Library, Royal MSS: Appx 68, f. 32b as quoted in Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 110.

<sup>30</sup> Webbe, Edward. *The rare and most vnderfull things which Edvv. Vvebbe an Englishman borne, hath seene and passed in his troublesome trauailes in the cities of Ierusalem, Damasko, Bethlehem and Galely and in the landes of Iewrie, Egypt, Gracia, Russia, and Prester Iohn, vwherein is set forth his extreame slauery sustained many yeeres together in the gallies and warres of the great Turke, against the lands of Persia, Tartaria, Spaine, and Portugale*. (London: 1590), C1.

Nathaniel Bacon gave to his three daughters “the jewel of unicorn’s horn, according their mother’s direction, that each one may challenge the use thereof when needs require, and my wife may have the use thereof when she needs, but my daughter [Anne] Townshend is to have the custody thereof for life.”<sup>31</sup> Even monarchs owned pieces of the poison detector. In an inventory of the deceased Mary Queen of Scots’ belongings is listed “a piece of an unicorn's horn.” In addition, Queen Elizabeth had at least two pieces in her possession; one “a Tablett of Unicornes horne having in it a whistle and a woman sitting upon it” and another “litle pece of Unicorne” in a locket with a cameo portrait of the Queen.<sup>32</sup> Given the horn’s “blackish” color as described by Webbe, it likely did not receive admiration due to an inherent beauty, as would have been the case with a diamond or other colorful gem. Thus, the close proximity of Elizabeth’s portrait with a poison detector may have been an attempt to protect the Queen through sympathetic or image magic.

In the early modern period common belief held that a sympathetic association could exist between objects that resemble or physically contact one another. Due to this association, it was believed that individuals could be physically or mentally affected by whatever was done to a figure that was cast in their likeness or done to the item with which they came into contact. For example, a painting or drawing of a person or an image made of wax or clay could be used to cause the person in which the likeness was made great harm in the form of illness, insanity, or death. Conversely, the same image

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<sup>31</sup> Will of Sir Nathaniel Bacon, June 4, 1614. *Calendar of state papers, domestic series, of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*, Addenda, 1580-1625: Ed. Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett Green. (London: Longman & Co., 1872), 541.

<sup>32</sup> An inventarye of the jewells, plate, money, and other goods found in the custodye of the severall servaunts of the late Quene of Scotts, Feb. 25 1587. *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland, 1509-1603*: Vol 2, Appendix 1543-1592 Ed. Markham John Thorpe (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans, 1858), 1019; British Library, Royal MSS: Appx 68, ff. 7, 7b as quoted in Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain*, 110.



could cure the person of disease, induce love, or enable a barren woman to have a child.<sup>33</sup>

Queen Elizabeth was herself a victim of harmful image magic during her reign.

Authorities found a wax image in her likeness at Lincoln's Inn Fields and they sent the figure to her philosopher John Dee in the hopes that he could counteract the evil magic.<sup>34</sup>

Another case of malice involving image magic occurred in England in 1589, when a Mrs. Dewse consulted a conjuror to make pictures of her enemies so that she could "pricke them to the harte" and through this magic "they mighte all dye." The conjuror refused to make the images, but this did not dissuade Mrs. Dewes who made the three pictures herself and proceeded to stick pins in the likenesses of her enemies. She later confessed that "shee thanked God some of her pictures did worke well and so she hoped would all the reste."<sup>35</sup>

Given the fact that Queen Elizabeth witnessed image-making in her own likeness, it seems plausible that she would take precautions to protect herself from forms of harmful sympathetic magic. In fact, she may have used image magic in conjunction with stones as a means of protection. Perhaps the queen had the unicorn's horn placed in her locket in order for the stone to have contact with her image to protect her from being poisoned. Whether or not this was Elizabeth's intention for the unicorn's horn, a known

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<sup>33</sup> Christina Hole, "Some Instances of Image-Magic in Great Britain" in *The Witch Figure: folklore essays by a group of scholars in England honouring the 75<sup>th</sup> birthday of Katharine M. Briggs* ed. Venetia Newall (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), 80.

<sup>34</sup> Elizabeth's court philosopher John Dee recorded in his autobiography that "My carefull and faithfull endeavours was with great speede required . . . to prevent the mischief, which divers of her Majesties Privy Councell suspected to be intended against her Majesties person, by means of a certain image of wax, with a great pin stuck into it about the brest of it, found in Lincolnes Inn fields" (*The Compendious Rehearsal* [1592], in John Dee, *Autobiographical Tracts*, ed. James Crossley, (Kessinger Publishing, 2003), 21; the entry is undated.

<sup>35</sup> W.H. Hart, "Observations on some documents relating to magic in the reign of Queen Elizabeth" *Archaeologia* 40 (1867) 395.

attempt to poison Elizabeth during her tenure as queen did not succeed and she reigned over England for a long and fruitful forty-five years.<sup>36</sup>

While much of the population was concerned with bewitching and poisoning, many people consulted cunning folk, midwives, and astrologer-physicians for services such as love magic, thief detection, astrology and fortune telling. Stones and gems performed a role in these areas of magic too. The prospect of obtaining sudden wealth was just as appealing to past individuals as it is to us today. For many in the early modern period this hope of riches could only be realized by the discovery of hidden treasure. One such case occurred in 1570 when a “certen cristall stone” was employed to discover the whereabouts of a sum of money believed to be hidden in a house in Kent. The diviner summoned “the sprite Oryence to see whether he wold appere in the sayd cristall” and divulge the whereabouts of the money. Unfortunately, “no such sprete nor any other thing” appeared and the diviner declared that he “could doo no good in that matter” and the money was never found.<sup>37</sup> An individual, however, did not need to rely on a diviner to acquire wealth. According to Albertus Magnus’ *Book of Secrets* an emerald “augme[n]teth the ryches” of its bearer and “if any man shall holde it under his tung, he shall prophecy anone.”<sup>38</sup> Overall, these commonly seen properties of precious

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<sup>36</sup> An assassination attempt using poison took place in June 1597 by Edward Squire, a stable hand of the Queen’s. Squire had been unhappy with his position in the stables and he signed up to sail with Francis Drake in 1595 to the West Indies. The ship Squire was on got separated from the rest and was captured by the Spanish. Squire apparently offered his services to the English Jesuit Father Richard Walpole. Paid for his services in advance, Squire returned to England with orders to poison Elizabeth. He resumed his job in the Queen’s stables and rubbed some poison on Elizabeth’s saddle and pommel, but with no result. Due to Squire’s lack of success and the fact that he had taken money for a job he did not complete led his contacts in Spain to believe he might be a double agent and someone informed the English government about Squire’s assassination attempt. He was arrested in November 1598 and indicted for high treason. Carole Levin, *The Reign of Elizabeth* (New York: Palgrave, 2002), 100-1.

<sup>37</sup> Hart, “Documents relating to magic in the reign of Queen Elizabeth” 391-92.

<sup>38</sup> Albertus Magnus, *The boke of secretes of Albertus Magnus of the vertues of herbes, stones, and certayne beasts : also, a boke of the same author, of the maruaylous thinges of the world, and of certayne effectes caused of certayne beastes* (London 1565) n.p.

stones and the frequency with which they were sought imply a shared belief by individuals for the need to protect against troubles such as bewitchment and poisoning, yet early modern people also appropriated stones for reasons of personal gain.

As indicated by the variety of literature and discourse on the properties of precious stones, it is clear that many people in early modern England valued these gems for their supposed magical abilities, but precious stones also served important medicinal functions in early modern society. Through the examination of lapidaries and medical texts from the period, we can see an interconnection between the medicinal properties associated with gemstones and the medical beliefs and practices of Renaissance society.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries the best medical knowledge was claimed to come from the works of Greek and Roman medical writers. Indeed, the Renaissance understanding of medicine, disease, and overall functions of the human body came from classical authors such as Hippocrates, Galen, and Pliny.<sup>39</sup> Several scholars and medical practitioners translated and edited these classical works and those of contemporary medical institutions into the vernacular. One such man was Nicholas Culpeper, seventeenth century philosopher and physician. Culpeper had a keen interest in medicine from a young age, and studied with several apothecaries in London. In 1639, he began working as an unlicensed assistant to an apothecary named Samuel Leadbetter where he diagnosed and treated patients for various illnesses. His unlicensed status brought him into constant conflict with the College of Physicians who disliked losing clients to the less expensive apothecaries throughout town. Culpeper, however, did not

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<sup>39</sup> Andrew Wear, *Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine, 1550-1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

let this discourage him and he was eventually able to open his own practice outside of London in 1644. Not only was Culpeper committed to continue treating the poor, powerless, and uneducated, he also decided to translate and rewrite medical works from Latin into English. His wish was to make these texts easier to understand for literate laymen and to give more people a chance to help themselves. Following this desire, Culpeper worked to translate the *Pharmacopoeia*, the College of Physician's large medical compendium commonly referred to as the "London Dispensatory." In 1649 his task was completed and Culpeper published his work titled *A Physicall Directory, or a Translation of the London Dispensatory*. This was not, however, a simple translation of the College of Physician's *Pharmacopoeia*. Rather, it was a self-help book in which Culpeper added new information that included recipes, definitions of terms, and instructions on how to make medicines.<sup>40</sup>

Through Culpeper's work and other texts translated into English such as Anglicus Bartholomaeus' *De Proprietatibus Rerum* and Jean de Renou's *A Medicinal Dispensatory*, a wide spectrum of publications filled with medical information reached a broader audience. Causes, treatments and remedies for illnesses would come from these works and be refined only when one came across something that worked better. Trained physicians and apothecaries studied these texts and were available to treat the public; however, not all people lived near a doctor or could afford visitation and treatment fees. Therefore, many people ended up treating themselves. In fact, the majority of medicine was largely practiced by relatives, neighbors and friends who learned of treatments and

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<sup>40</sup> Patrick Curry, "Culpeper, Nicholas (1616–1654)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004), <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.unl.edu/view/article/6882> (accessed March 3, 2009).

remedies from publications, those handed down through family, or from personal experience. Indeed, Culpeper described it best when he claimed “All the Nation are already Physitians, If you ayl any thing, every one you meet, whether man or woman will prescribe you a medicine for it.”<sup>41</sup> Whether or not an individual’s medical expertise was effective was another matter entirely.

Lapidaries contained extensive material on the nature, virtue, and value of precious stones and acted as textbooks of medical remedies. Moreover, because of these descriptions of stones, along with the instructions given by physicians, and the advice of family, a firm ethos of certainty regarding the power of stones took root. The wealth of information exchanged amongst the public, either through literature or by word of mouth, helped further the belief that the medicinal properties of precious stones could cure the body and mind. In fact, word of mouth became extremely important in spreading the healing and protective properties of stones and gems. For example, Nicholas Cabry, apothecary to Secretary Francis Walsingham, received a shipment of several rarities from a friend living in Turkey, and one of these items was unicorn’s horn. In a letter to Walsingham dated August 1582, Cabry writes that he sends the Secretary “excellent things from Constantinople for resisting poison, and especially unicorn's stone, which may be tried before buying it with good success, on animals to whom arsenic has been given.”<sup>42</sup> Less than a month later Cabry sends upon request a second shipment of unicorn’s horn to Walsingham. In the letter accompanying the package Cabry graciously thanks the Secretary for his positive reception of the first delivery and remarks “I now send, *as you order*, 1/2 oz. of

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<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, *A physycall directory, or, A translation of the London dispensatory made by the Colledge of Physicians in London*. (London: 1649), A2.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholas Cabry to Secretary Walsingham, Aug. 10/20 1582. *Calendar of state papers, domestic series, of the Reigns of Elizabeth and James I*, Addenda, 1580-1625: Ed. Robert Lemon and Mary Anne Everett Green. (London: Longman & Co., 1872), 71.

unicorn's stone, which I have tried.”<sup>43</sup> While we do not know how the apothecary tested the unicorn's horn for its efficacy, by mentioning that he “tried” the poison detector and then sent the sample to his employer illustrates that he believed in the poison detecting properties of the stone. Moreover, the fact that Walsingham ordered more of the horn suggests that he found benefit as well in its protective abilities.

In another account demonstrating the significance of word of mouth, an anonymous author recalls that jade “being pierced with a hole and hung about the place where you are pained ... causeth the stone to break ... as hath been proven by diverse skillful men here in England. I saw one of these stones in the hands of My Lord Thomon an Irish Lord who delivered [to] me the [stone] to cut into two pieces for him to give the one piece to a friend of his. He made great estimation of the stone and affirmed upon his honor that the same stone had that virtue to break the stone.”<sup>44</sup> Thus, through word of mouth jade became known as a stone with the ability to “break” gall and kidney stones, both common afflictions in the early modern period.

Lapidaries discussed stones as possessing medicinal virtues that could “cure Diseases, preserve Health, recreate the Eyes, exhilarate the Minde, and drive away Sadness therewith.”<sup>45</sup> Many of these healing virtues addressed diseases and illnesses prevalent during the Renaissance. Medical texts and lapidaries from the period attributed a large number of stones with the ability to relieve ailments of a gastro-intestinal or respiratory nature. In fact, one medical treatise claimed sapphire could purge “Ulcers in

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<sup>43</sup> Emphasis is mine. Nicholas Cabry to Secretary Walsingham, Sept. 19/29 1582. *CSP Domestic* 73.

<sup>44</sup> B.M. Sloane 2539, p. 149 in Evans, *Magical Jewels*, 175.

<sup>45</sup> Jean de Renou, *A medicinal dispensatory, containing the vvhole body of physick discovering the natures, properties, and vertues of vegetables, minerals, & animals: the manner of compounding medicaments, and the way to administer them. Methodically digested in five books of philosophical and pharmaceutical institutions; three books of physical materials galenical and chymical. Together with a most perfect and absolute pharmacopoea or apothecaries shop. Accommodated with three useful tables. Composed by the illustrious Renodaeus, chief physician to the monarch of France; and now Englished and revised, by Richard Tomlinson of London, apothecary* (London, 1657), 412.

the Intestines” and topaz “helpeth them that have Emoroids.”<sup>46</sup> The College of Physicians believed the stone amber “helps violent coughs, helps consumptions of the lunges [and] spitting of blood.”<sup>47</sup> Interestingly, many physicians during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries recorded gastro-enteric and respiratory infections as the most common illnesses affecting society along with sporadic epidemics of plague.<sup>48</sup> Thus, it is not surprising that medical and lapidary texts of the day attributed stones with properties that could repel, heal or relieve the symptoms of these illnesses. Furthermore, these stones would be at their greatest restorative ability only if used in the proper amounts or placed in the proper location on the patient. In fact, in order to be the most efficacious as a medical treatment, many lapidaries called for stones to be worn as amulets or crushed into a powder and administered as an elixir.

These elixirs seemed to be especially popular in the literature of the day. Seventeenth century scientist and philosopher Francis Bacon called medicines that prolonged life “cordials.” According to Bacon, in his treatise *The Historie of Life and Death*, only certain stones classified as cordials. He described pearls and emeralds as being especially potent for prolonging life when they are “taken in loose powder, or dissolved in the sharpe juyce of *green Lemons*, or in spiced comfits, and drinkes.”<sup>49</sup> Nicols described an elixir made with coral that was to be very “effectuall against vomiting, and to cure all fluxes of the belly.”<sup>50</sup> Simon Forman also used stones for medical reasons and in his diary he recorded treating himself with an elixir that included

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<sup>46</sup> Renou, *A Medicinal dispensatory*, 412; Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 268.

<sup>47</sup> Culpeper, *A physycall directory*, 73.

<sup>48</sup> Wear, *English Medicine*, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Francis Bacon, *The historie of life and death With observations naturall and experimentall for the prolonging of life* (London, 1638), 132.

<sup>50</sup> Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea*, 164.

pearl, coral, and amber stones.<sup>51</sup> Even monarchs were not above using precious stones in attempts to heal their loved ones. For example, in 1612, a physician used a concoction of unicorn's horn, powdered with pearl and deerbone to help treat James I's ailing son Henry, Prince of Wales.<sup>52</sup> Despite this combination of stones and the attempts of a bevy of physicians, the young Prince succumbed to his fever and died in the fall of that year.

As previously mentioned, the lapidaries and medical texts of the early modern period attributed the strongest restorative abilities with the most desirable stones. Diamonds were used "to helpe them that be lunatike or phrantike" and preserved the wearer from "swooning."<sup>53</sup> A sapphire was "the fairest of all pretious stones" and a "great enemy to blacke choler." This stone "helpeth agues and gowts...it hath virtue against venome, and staieth bleeding at the nose being often put thereto."<sup>54</sup> Belief held that the sapphire and pearl could "recreate the heart" and help against "cardiacle passion."<sup>55</sup> Ruby and coral were precious stones prized for their ability to reveal danger or illness. A ruby worn as an amulet would "keep the body in safety, and that if any danger be towards it, it will grow black and obscure" A coral, on the other hand would "contract ungratefull spots, if the possessour of it be dangerously sick."<sup>56</sup> Coral also had another very important function as a medicinal stone: an ability to protect children. Physicians advised that coral be given to "new-born children as soon as they are come into the world, before they have tasted any thing, ten grains of the powder of *Corall* in

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<sup>51</sup> Ashmole Manuscript, 1491, p. 942 in Kassel, *Medicine and Magic*, 189.

<sup>52</sup> Armstrong, *Jewellery*, 118.

<sup>53</sup> Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 255; Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea*, 51.

<sup>54</sup> Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 442; Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, 295-6.

<sup>55</sup> Renou, *A Medicinal dispensatory*, 412; Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum*, 262.

<sup>56</sup> Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea*, 58, 164.



the mothers milk” and the child “shall be preserved all the days of their life from epilepsie.”<sup>57</sup>

In typical Renaissance fashion, society took great delight in all things beautiful, and precious stones were no exception. Yet, these stones were valued for more than their sparkling natures. As we have seen, tradition and ancient authority lent credence to the early modern belief in a stone’s magical and medicinal properties. Thus, a person, afflicted by some sort of misfortune, whether caused by natural or supernatural means, entrusted stones to provide for their well-being. English merchant John Frampton was one of many individuals during the sixteenth century to recognize the worth of gems when he remarked “that the excellencie of these...Stones hath been knowen to bee so precious a remedie for all manner of diseases, and hurtes that maie happe unto Man, Woman, or Childe.”<sup>58</sup> Through statements such as Frampton’s and the numerous medical and lapidary literature from the period a window onto the cultural beliefs of early modern society is revealed, and we find that precious stones were believed to play an integral role in the natural and supernatural world.

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<sup>57</sup> Nicols, *Arcula Gemmea*, 164.

<sup>58</sup>Epistle Dedicatory written by John Frampton in Nicolas Monardes’, *Ioyfull Newes out of the New Founde World* (London, 1580), n.p.

## CHAPTER 2: A “PRECIOUS” ASSET

Early modern England was a society that admired luxuriousness of material, curiosity of workmanship, and the use of rich embellishment, especially as these applied to consumer goods. Whether men or women came from noble houses, were aspiring gentry, or well-to-do citizens, each used luxury goods to identify themselves as cultivated, refined, learned and European. Jewelry in particular, was a luxury item that indicated social status and collecting it was not only a private passion but also a public performance.<sup>1</sup> The evidence from contemporary literature, letters, wills and statutes indicates that precious stones and jewels were among the most valued of material possessions and like most art forms, jewelry was a reflection of the society that produced it. The heavy and heavily overwrought style of Elizabethan and Stuart jewelry conveys an overall effect of magnificence – a magnificence that was the object of rich costume, but also a medium of communication. While jewels were objects of personal adornment, these glittering ornaments also reveal much about the social and economic conditions of early modern society.

A redistribution of wealth due to the dissolution of monasteries during the Reformation heralded a change in who wore jewelry and the type of jewelry made. King Henry VIII of England had to sell the bulk of his profits from the dissolution to save his country from bankruptcy due to his foreign policy decisions and wars with Scotland and France.<sup>2</sup> Therefore, ex-monastic lands were on the market and knights and squires who

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<sup>1</sup> Linda Levy Peck, *Consuming Splendor: Society and Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 186.

<sup>2</sup> Lacey Baldwin Smith, ed. *This Realm of England: 1399-1688* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 123.

lacked the opportunity before could now profit from the land just as monarchs, clergy, and the aristocracy had done for centuries. This was a vital turning point in the socio-economic lives of landed gentry because land was not only profitable in early modern society it also bestowed a “mark of respectability” upon its owner.<sup>3</sup> This new class of country gentlemen gained social recognition and profited greatly from their land. As a result, these families were now able to join the upper classes in spending their revenue on the trends of the day: fashion, jewelry, art, and entertainment. Moreover, in this age of conspicuous consumption these women and men used luxury materials, such as precious stones, to identify themselves as cultivated, refined, learned and European. Wealthy men wore collars and neck chains decorated with pendants and jewels. Women wore necklaces and bracelets adorned with jewels; they pierced their ears and twisted pearls through their hair. Men and women wore a profusion of jeweled rings and clothing came fully decorated with gem-encrusted pendants, brooches, and ornamental buttons in order to show off one’s jewels to the best advantage.<sup>4</sup> In the opinion of these elites, however, such luxury items were trimmings of authority and as such should only be worn by the privileged.

In an age when the Crown, aristocracy and episcopacy held social and political power, the protection of social difference became incredibly important. Due to the expanding middle-class and their growing expenditures on luxury goods, distinctions in class started to blur by the mid-sixteenth century. This disturbing effect had London pamphleteer Phillip Stubbes complaining about the “pride of apparel” and the lack of

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<sup>3</sup> Lacey Baldwin Smith, *This Realm of England*, 82.

<sup>4</sup> Charles R Beard, “Jewellery,” *The Tudor Period 1500-1603* eds. Ralph Edwards and L.G.G. Ramsey (New York: Reynal and Company, 1956), 143, 145.

“comely order” in dress his fellow countrymen exhibited: “...by wearing an Apparell more gorgeous, sumptuous and precious than our state, calling or condition of life requireth, whereby we are puffed up into Pride, and induced to think of ourselves more than we ought.” He laments further that “now there is such a confuse mingle mangle of apparell in England, and such horrible excess therof ... that it is very hard to knowe who is worshipful, who is a Gentleman and who is not”<sup>5</sup>

To attack this blurring of social classes caused by excess in dress English monarchs passed sumptuary legislation. These “Acts of Apparel” outlined what each person could wear based on his or her social status. Many of the acts of apparel during Elizabeth’s reign were modifications of certain clauses of the statutes issued during Henry VIII’s, Edward VI’s and Mary I’s reigns. Elizabeth’s first proclamation dealing with dress was issued in 1559 and further orders were issued at intervals throughout her reign whenever a new abuse came into fashion or if the Queen felt existing legislation was not being enforced. We can see the latter occurrence in a royal order published 6 July 1597. The proclamation began as follows:

Whereas the Quenes Majestie, for avoyding of the great inconvenience that hath growen and daily doth increase within this her relm by the inordinate excess in apparel, hath .... by sondry former proclamations straitly charged and comaunded those in autorite under her to see her lawes provided in that behalfe duely executed: Wherof notwithstanding, partly through their negligence and partly by the manifest contempt and disobedience of the parties offending, no reformation at all hath followed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Phillip Stubbes, *The anatomie of abuses Containing a description of such notable vices and enormities, as raigne in many countries of the world, but especiaillie in this realme of England* (London, 1595), 8.

<sup>6</sup> William Jerden, ed., “The Rutland Papers” in Camden Society Publications, no. xxii, p. 247, quoted in Francis Elizabeth Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation and Personal Regulation in England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1926), 226.

The proclamation then proceeds to lay out the new laws against excess of apparel, and is broken into men's apparel and women's apparel. While cloth of gold or silver, silk, satin, and velvet textiles were the common items listed in the numerous proclamations issued during Elizabeth's reign, the decree from 1597 also includes "pearl" in the women's apparel listing. The statute forbids anyone below the rank of Baroness from wearing any silk or cloth, mixed or embroidered with pearl, gold or silver.<sup>7</sup>

The mention of pearl is significant in sumptuary legislation. Early modern society held the pearl in high esteem and many people placed this mineral second only in importance to diamonds. Unlike the diamond, the pearl was an amazing product of nature that required no human hand to improve upon its appearance.<sup>8</sup> A rich source of myth and history, the pearl had long been valued for its medicinal properties and its biblical association with purity. According to one sixteenth century lapidary, the pearl had a "certain specialtie" to "helpe against the Cardiacle passion, and against sounding or fayling of hart, against féeblesse that commeth of the bloodie flire, & against flire of the wombe." The lapidary also tells us that the pearl had a biblical association, for people believed it to be "gendred of the deaw of heuen."<sup>9</sup> Thus, due to this belief in the pearl's divine origins, people transformed the dew myth into a metaphor for the Virgin Mary and the pearl became a symbol of chasteness and virginity. In fact, Queen Elizabeth loved wearing this "heavenly" gem. In many of her portraits she is painted in a profusion of pearls along with images of the ermine and the sieve, both symbols of purity and

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<sup>7</sup> Baldwin, *Sumptuary Legislation*, 228.

<sup>8</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Brilliant Effects: A Cultural History of Gem Stones and Jewellery* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 112-13.

<sup>9</sup> Anglicus Bartholomaeus, *De proprietatibus rerum* (London: 1582), 262.

virginity. Elizabeth appropriated these symbols along with the pearls to help cultivate her image as a virgin queen. Given the supposed properties and divine virtues associated with the pearl and its use in Elizabeth's efforts at self-presentation, it becomes apparent why there was a desire on the part of the elite to ensure that pearls, a symbol of nature's perfection and purity, not fall into the hands of the lower classes.

Despite this symbolic connection with chastity, men esteemed the beauty of the pearl too. Indeed, the pearl was a common and expensive purchase for members of the aristocracy. For example, in the first eighteen months after succession to his earldom in 1585, Henry Percy, spent more than £1,000 on jewelry: he bought 440 pearls to decorate his clothes which amounted to about £25, a single pearl chain cost nearly £200, and a diamond jewel purchased from Sir Walter Raleigh cost £800.<sup>10</sup> In 1610, William, Lord Compton, future Earl of Northampton, inherited the vast wealth of his father-in-law, Sir John Spencer, a London cloth merchant. Soon after her father's death, Lady Elizabeth Compton asked her husband for £6,000 to spend on jewels and £4,000 for a pearl chain to appear suitably attired at court.<sup>11</sup> As indicated by the sumptuary laws and the records of jewelry purchases by the elite, the English aristocracy and nobility were concerned with maintaining distinction in rank and used jewelry to aid in this affiliation with social status. Furthermore, the proclamations of apparel illustrate the import that early modern society placed upon the ability of clothing and jewels to not only convey one's social status, but perhaps also confer specific virtues onto the wearer.

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<sup>10</sup> Gordon R. Batho, "The Finances of an Elizabethan Nobleman: Henry Percy, Ninth Earl of Northumberland (1564-1632)," *Economic History Review* 2<sup>nd</sup> ser. 9 (1957): 447.

<sup>11</sup> Diana Scarisbrick, *Jewellery in Britain 1066-1837: A Documentary, Social, Literary, and Artistic Survey* (Norwich: Michael Russell Ltd., 1994), 73.

Extravagance reached a grand scale at royal courts and the jewels worn made a strong statement not only about the individual but also to the world at large about the wealth of the monarch and his or her nation. In order for England to receive recognition as an economic, diplomatic and cultural equal among its European neighbors it not only needed a brilliant and intellectual monarch at the helm, the country also needed to project an image of wealth and sophistication. This concern over projecting an image of economic stability is apparent in an exchange that occurred between James I and his Privy Council over the decision to host a masque. Traditionally performed around the Christmas holiday, masques became formal entertainments at the English court during the reigns of Elizabeth I and James I. As calculated ceremonies of display, royal masques were an opportunity to see and be seen at court. Queen Anne's masques, in particular, were spectacular shows and viewed as especially significant court occasions, highly relevant to the display not only of the queen, but also of the general European significance of the English Crown. We can see the important role masques served in propagating England's image in a warning the Privy Council gave to James who thought about cancelling the masque of Christmas 1604 when he found out how much it would cost. The Council observed that abandoning the idea of a Christmas masque merely "for the saving of £4,000 would be more pernicious than the expense of ten times the value." For if foreign ambassadors found out that an event at the English court had been cancelled because it cost the sum of £4,000, then "the judgment that will follow will be neither safe nor honorable." That is to say, opinions might be formed regarding either a hidden financial weakness in the kingdom that might be able to be exploited, or a lack of appropriate "greatness" – of magnanimity in the quality of James himself.<sup>12</sup> The English

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<sup>12</sup> *Salisbury MSS*, 16:388, quoted in Leeds Barroll, *Anna of Denmark, Queen of England: A Cultural*

government was well aware of the importance of creating an image of economic stability that would be recognized by foreign countries, thus they warned James not to cancel the masque lest it make the English court seem short of money.

Aside from lavish court entertainments, the monarchs of England used their jewelry as tools to convey the economic prosperity and stability of England. Visiting dignitaries appraised these jewels and then reported to foreign courts on the royal splendor they had witnessed. For example, in 1559, the Venetian ambassador II Schifanoja reported that the Queen upon meeting two ambassadors from France was “dressed entirely in purple velvet, with so much gold and so many pearls and jewels that it added much to her beauty.”<sup>13</sup> Similarly, after a meeting with Elizabeth on behalf of Charles, Archduke of Austria, the German envoy Johann Jacob Breuning von Buchenbach commented that “Her Majesty was dressed in a silver robe and adorned with magnificent gems and jewels beyond compare. On her head she wore a royal crown of pearls.”<sup>14</sup> The Stuart monarchs also used ostentatious displays of jewelry to represent the wealth of England. In 1608, Zorzi Giustinian, the Venetian ambassador at the Stuart court commented on Queen Anne’s regal appearance after a performance of Ben Johnson’s *The Masque of Beauty*:

I must just touch on the splendor of the spectacle, which was worthy of her Majesty’s greatness. The apparatus and the cunning of the stage machinery was a miracle, the abundance and beauty of the lights immense, the music and dance most sumptuous. But what beggared all else and possibly exceeded the public expectation was the wealth of

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*Biography* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 100.

<sup>13</sup> *Calendar of state papers and manuscripts, relating to English affairs existing in the archives and collection of Venice*, Vol. VII, no. 77 (London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1864), 92.

<sup>14</sup> Victor Klarwill, ed., *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners, being a series of hitherto unpublished letters from the archives of the Hapsburg family*. (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, Ltd., 1928), 366.



pearls and jewels that adorned the Queen and her ladies, so abundant and splendid that in everyone's opinion no other court could have displayed such pomp and riches.<sup>15</sup>

This same event even impressed John Chamberlain, an Englishman who moved in court circles and attended the event. "Whatsoever the device may be," as Chamberlain noted, "and what success they may have in their dancing, yet you should have been sure to have seen great riches in jewels, when one lady, and that under a baroness, is said to be furnished for better than an hundred thousand pounds; and the Lady Arabella goes beyond her, and the Queen must not come behind."<sup>16</sup> This ability of jewelry to both bestow and receive glory reveals the reciprocal nature of Renaissance magnificence. Not only were jewels capable of creating a sparkling visual panoply due to their inherent beauty, but they were also praised for their ability to enhance a nation's visible image of wealth and power.

Although the English monarchs and their courtiers hosted lavish entertainments and wore sumptuous clothing and jewelry, they consistently lived beyond their means due to their expenditure on luxury goods and other extravagances in an attempt to keep pace with social conventions. Henry Percy, the nobleman whom we previously learned spent thousands of pounds on jewelry in his first year as Earl of Northumberland, serves as the perfect example of this lifestyle and the ensuing result. He confesses that his first few months as Earl were a period of profligacy:

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<sup>15</sup> *CSP Ven.*, Vol. XI (1607-10), 86.

<sup>16</sup> John Chamberlain, *Letters*, ed., N.E. McClure (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1939), 1:250-53.

Then were my felicities (because I knew not better) hawks, hounds, horses, dice, cards, apparel, mistresses; all other riot of expense that follow them were so far afoot and in excess as I knew not where I was, or what I did, till out of my means of £3,000 yearly I had made shift in one year and a half to be £15,000 in debt. Thus being fallen into creditors' clamours, a greater discontent to me than some other, my lands being entailed [by the restoration of the title and lands in 1557], all our wits fell a consulting how this burden might be eased, my mind then being over-wearied with the suits of poor people whose goods I had and could not satisfy, each calling for his own...<sup>17</sup>

Given the lavish lifestyles and frivolous spending of the nobility and aristocracy, it comes as no surprise that these individuals often came up short on money. In the early modern period, however, borrowing money was not simply a matter of taking out a loan at the nearest bank. This was due in large part to the lack of a centralized banking system, a system not created until late in the seventeenth century.<sup>18</sup> Rather, people borrowed from each other and they often used precious stones and jewels as a negotiable asset. Thus, pawning or selling jewelry became a common occurrence. This system of bartering was especially useful for those monarchs who were not solvent (whether from war or poor spending habits) and needed money quickly.

Upon Elizabeth's accession to the throne, the English Treasury was bankrupt and the credit of the government very low. She faced this currency crisis due to the successive debasements of the coinage resorted to by every ruler since Henry VIII. Furthermore, her sister, Mary I, had left her with a debt of £227,000.<sup>19</sup> Yet the Queen and her government managed for a time to successfully deal with this problem of

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<sup>17</sup> Batho, "The Finances of an Elizabethan Nobleman", 436.

<sup>18</sup> Stephanie Chamberlain, "'Rings and Things' in *Twelfth Night*: Gift Exchange, Debt and the Early Modern Matrimonial Economy," *Journal of the Wooden O Symposium*, (Jan 2007) 7: 3-4.

<sup>19</sup> Lacey Baldwin Smith, *This Realm of England*, 180.

unstable currency. In 1560, Elizabeth called in and re-coined all silver and gold coins in circulation, and used the livery companies to aid in enforcement by sending out representatives into the markets to ensure that only new currency was changing hands. Thus, the nation's debt was then paid off and for the first time since the days of Henry VII, the English nation was solvent.<sup>20</sup> While Elizabeth may have performed a fiscal miracle in the early part of her reign by restoring money to England's empty treasury, issuing new currency and paying off the nation's debt, in the second half of her reign she was a monarch in need of money. By 1568, the economic situation in England began to change. England faced Catholic rebellion at home and crisis abroad from the Spanish menace. Ultimately, war with Spain led to new debt and the Queen had to start relying on subsidies from Parliament that averaged £50,000 annually.<sup>21</sup>

Another means by which Elizabeth sought to secure funds that did not call for her dependence on Parliament was through the sale of gemstones. In a letter from Paris dated 13 May 1582, Henry Cobham, English ambassador in France, wrote to Sir Francis Walsingham: "I sought to do you what service I could in the well putting away of the diamond; having dealt with Escosse, merchant jeweller, according to your direction, to have his means, toward the king." Unfortunately, Cobham reports that he could not persuade Escosse to offer the diamond to the king because the man was unsure if he would get "ready money" from the French King if he tried to sell the diamond to him. Rather, the merchant replies he is likely to get "assignments and assurance" from the king that he will pay. After failing to convince Escosse, Cobham then explains that he "thought it therefore not amiss to prove what good hap [he] might have through M.

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<sup>20</sup> Liza Picard, *Elizabeth's London: Everyday Life in Elizabethan London* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 256.

<sup>21</sup> Lacey Baldwin Smith, *This Realm of England*, 227.

Pinart's means." Cobham is able to convince M. Pinart to present the diamond to the King only to be told that "the king esteems it but is not desirous to buy it." Undeterred, Cobham then approaches one "M. de Gondi" whom he hears is "one of the best-stored courtiers of money." He asked de Gondi "whether he would bestow 60,000 crowns on a rare diamond" but found the gentleman "to shrink at the matter." Frustrated by his inability to sell the diamond, Cobham suggests to Walsingham that the Queen consider putting the diamond in a "lottery" that is being held by a foreign merchant in France.<sup>22</sup> While we do not know the fate of the stone, Cobham's numerous attempts to sell the ring suggest urgency on the part of the English crown for the money that would have resulted from a successful sale. Given that Cobham's negotiations occurred in the early 1580s this urgency for money is explainable, for this was a period in which Elizabeth faced plots against her rule and looming war with Spain. Thus, money was essential for the manpower and supplies needed to address these issues.

Although Cobham had orders to sell the Queen's diamond, there were those individuals who put their jewels up as security for loans. James I and his wife, Anne of Denmark, used this method frequently. Upon James's succession to the English throne, he inherited the debt left from the last years of Elizabeth's reign. Rather than work toward measures that would bring about solvency, James further dissipated the capital resources of the Crown. James lavished money on Court entertainments and his favorite courtiers. He also spent large sums on jewels, which he and his wife loved. His spending

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<sup>22</sup> Cobham to Walsingham, *Calendar of State Papers Foreign, Elizabeth, 1558-1589*, ed. Allan James Crosby. Vol. 16: May-Dec 1582 (London: Longman & Co, Truebner & Co, Parker & Co, Macmillan and Co, A&C Black, A. Thom., 1874), 493.

became so extravagant that in just under a decade of rule the royal debt had tripled; by 1610, James's debt was £700,000.<sup>23</sup>

Queen Anne's extravagant tastes and passion for jewelry put her in a position that required the continual raising of loans. She entered into a complex system of credit with one of her goldsmiths George Heriot. She would pawn her jewels by depositing them with Heriot as security for cash advances. More often than not, however, the Queen could not clear her outstanding debts to Heriot. In these instances, Anne would either pawn more royal jewels with Heriot, as a guarantee for future payment or offer partial payment, often accompanied by the deposit of pledges for the balance. In 1603, Anne pawned a jewel with 73 diamonds, as well as a thin table diamond and two emeralds, as security for payment of an outstanding debt of £7,539 13s 4d. In May 1609, the Queen handed over a collection of jewels "to be layed to pawn." These jewels were "ingaged for the some [sic] of one thousand three hundred and fyve pounds XVs." In April 1613, Anne pawned a jewel shaped like a rose and set with diamonds for £700 sterling. By the end of 1616, Heriot reckoned that Anne's outstanding debts to him came to £4,529 and by June 1617, James was in debt to Heriot for £10,091. In the end, it is unknown whether Heriot received compensation by the monarchs for these outstanding balances. We do know, however, that while some of this debt had been accrued on jewels at pawn, much of the value came from the fact that he was receiving ten percent interest on the loans, many of which had gone unpaid for five years.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Roger Lockyer, *James VI & I* (London and New York: Longman, 1998), 79; Lawrence Stone, "The Anatomy of the Elizabethan Aristocracy," in *The Economic History Review* (1948) 18, no1/2: 1-53: 40.

<sup>24</sup> Bruce P. Lenman, "Jacobean Goldsmith-Jewellers as Credit-Creators: The Cases of James Mossman, James Cockie and George Heriot" *Scottish Historical Review* (1995) 74, no. 2: 171, 173.

Monarchs were not alone, however, in suffering the pangs of debt. In 1607, poet and translator Sir Arthur Gorges fell on hard times and wrote to Robert Cecil, Earl of Salisbury inquiring if he might like to purchase a diamond and some pearls that he had previously pawned. He describes how he is no longer “able to redeem them, and less able to continue interest, [he] must sell them outright.” Furthermore, “they are in value all worth above 1,100*l.*, and engaged for less than 500*l.*, for on such pawns the goldsmiths will not lend half their value. If you have any disposition to buy such merchandise, you shall do me a high favour ... and that without any scruple or making yourself beholden to me, so much as I shall be to you therein.”<sup>25</sup>

While we do not know if Cecil took Gorges up on his offer, this was not the gentleman’s first time seeking to increase his fortune through the use of jewelry. In this next example, however, Sir Gorges made a gift of jewelry to the Queen with an eye toward improving his financial circumstances by gaining the wardship of his daughter. In a letter to the Privy Council in October 1603, Gorges recounts his efforts:

Gorges had a daughter Ambrosia, born by her mother to great possessions, for whose match in marriage he was offered 10,000*l.*, but at that time, by command of the Queen, an injunction was laid on him to deliver his daughter's body to the Master of the Wards: or else to enter into 6,000*l.* bonds not to contract her but by leave. He entered into the bonds, and followed his suit for the wardship 2 1/2 years, in conclusion *presenting her late Majesty with a bracelet of great pearls, fastened with a locker of diamond and rubies, which cost 500*l.**, for her favour therein; but yet was afterwards fined to pay 1000*l.* more for the wardship of the body, he having before taken the wardship of the lands. The child died before he could

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<sup>25</sup> Sir Arthur Gorges to the Earl of Salisbury *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, ed., S. R. Scargill-Bird, Vol. 19: 28 May 1607 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889), 141.

make any benefit of the wardship. By this he has been utterly ruined, and cast into a long and grievous sickness. Prays the King will free him of the sum of 400l., in which he is still bound in respect of the wardship.<sup>26</sup>

Despite Gorges' failed attempt to benefit from his daughter's inheritance and his pleading with Cecil to buy his pawned jewels, his material fortunes did finally improve by 1614 when his nephew Sir William Gorges bequeathed him the greater part of his Devon and Cornwall properties.<sup>27</sup> Sir Gorge was not alone in his gifting of jewelry as a means to garner wealth. Indeed, other aristocrats bestowed jewels upon Elizabeth for similar reasons of inheritance. In a letter to an unidentified correspondent, Sir John Harington, describes his hesitations and doubts regarding the planned offering of a gift to Elizabeth at the time when a lawsuit was pending to recover some of his forfeited ancestral land holdings. "I will adventure to give her Majestie five hundred pounds, in money, and some pretty jewell or garment, as you shall advyse; onlie praying her Majestie to further my suite with some of her lernede counsel, which I pray you to find some proper tyme to move in. This some hold as a dangerous adventure, but five and twentie manors do well warrant my trying it." The editor notes that in 1572 Harington did indeed give the queen a gold heart encrusted with diamonds, rubies, pearls, and emeralds: "thr q<sup>trs</sup> di. and farthing golde weight," according to the bookkeeper of the New Year's gifts.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Emphasis is mine. Sir Arthur Gorges to the Earl of Salisbury *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, ed., S. R. Scargill-Bird, Vol. 15: Oct 1603 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889), 276.

<sup>27</sup> Colin Burrow, "Gorges, Sir Arthur (d. 1625)," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: OUP, 2004); online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, January 2008, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.library.unl.edu/view/article/11097> (accessed May 5, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Sir John Harington, *Nugae Antiquae*, ed., Henry Harinton. 2 vols (New York: AMS, 1966), 1:118-19.

Another letter dated 5 March 1599 from Elizabeth, Dowager Lady Russell to her nephew Secretary Robert Cecil relates a similar story. Lady Russell seeks to renew the lease to Dunnington, an estate she has governed over for twenty years. She pleads with Cecil to convince the Queen to grant her the lease. Lady Russell proceeds to tell Cecil of the many gifts she has bestowed on the Queen in hopes of furthering her cause:

I gave her Majesty a canopy of tissue with curtains of crimson taffety, belited gold. I gave also two hats with two jewels, though I say it, fine hats; the one white beaver, the jewel of the one above a hundred pounds price, beside the pendent pearl, which cost me then 30*l.* more. And then it pleased her Majesty to acknowledge the jewel to be so fair as that she commanded it should be delivered to me again, but it was not; and after, by my Lady Cobham, your mother-in-law, when she presented my new year's gift of 30*l.* in fair gold, I received answer that her Majesty would grant my lease of Dunnington. Sir, I will be sworn that, in the space of 18 weeks, gifts to her Majesty cost me above 500*l.* in hope to have Dunnington lease.<sup>29</sup>

The actions of Sir Harington and Lady Russell reveal the role gifts played in the economic network of early modern England. The gift has long been recognized as an important vehicle for cultural exchange. Marcel Mauss' influential study *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* argues that implicit with the gift is the expectation of return. It is in this course of exchange that various goods circulate among members of the community and human beings construct and maintain social organization.<sup>30</sup> Mauss demonstrates that gift exchange was not a disinterested or spontaneous gesture but was, in fact, performed with formal pretence and social

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<sup>29</sup> Elizabeth, Dowager Lady Russel to Mr. Secretary [Cecil], *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury*, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire. Ed. R. A. Roberts. Vol. 10: 1600 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1904), 51.

<sup>30</sup> Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnisan (Glencoe, Ill., 1954), 1-2.



deception in which the honor of giver and recipient are engaged.<sup>31</sup> Each gift is part of a system of reciprocity, thus Sir John and Lady Russell expected a return gesture on the part of the Queen. Given that each hoped this reciprocation came in the form of land, the gift then becomes part of a complex system of exchange governing economic as well as social interactions.<sup>32</sup> Harington and Russell's gift giving was motivated by economic concerns, thus their jeweled gifts became part of an economic system of exchange and therefore participated in the early modern credit economy. By all accounts, Lady Russell received her lease renewal for a letter written by her to Robert Cecil in 1601 indicates that she was still residing at Dunnington.<sup>33</sup> Whether or not Harington received his ancestral properties remains a mystery, but we do know that Elizabeth accepted his gift. Moreover, she presented him a gift in return in the form of 40 ounces of gilt plate.<sup>34</sup> Although this was not the gift Harington desired, by reciprocating with a gift of her own the Queen acknowledged the debt while simultaneously bestowing her favor upon Harington. These gift exchanges reveal the extent to which the credit network was implicated in the most fundamental of social transactions in early modern England.

While the use of precious stones and jewels for market-oriented transactions reveal much about the workings of early modern England's economy, another use of jewelry, that of bequests in wills, opens a window onto female networks and how women influenced the economic well-being of their female kin. Early modern aristocratic women spent much of their time and energy seeing to the reproductive, managerial,

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<sup>31</sup> Mauss, *The Gift*, 10-11.

<sup>32</sup> Chamberlain, "Rings and Things," 1.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth, Dowager Lady Russel to Mr. Secretary [Cecil], *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury*, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire. Ed. R. A. Roberts. Vol. 11: 1601 (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1906), 562.

<sup>34</sup> John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. II (London: John Nichols and Son, 1823), 261.

political and social functions necessary for the survival and prosperity of their husbands' patrilineages.<sup>35</sup> Although these women were devoted to promoting the interests of their husbands and sons, there also existed strong emotional and material relationships between mothers and daughters, sisters, aunts, and nieces. Furthermore, because these women managed their estates and households they had control of property. This control, argues Barbara Harris, "enabled them to play a significant role in ensuring each other's material well-being."<sup>36</sup>

Women's wills provide evidence of their attachment to and material support of their female kin, whether natal or marital. While monetary legacies were popular between female relations, many bequests also included jewelry that the benefactor herself had worn. Legacies of jewels did more than enrich the recipients; they also expressed the donors' attachment to their female relation in a more personal way than cash. These bequests represented the ties between female relations through carefully chosen objects that the beneficiaries could use for the rest of their lives. For example, in 1540, Margery Waldegrace, who left both her goddaughters several pieces of gold jewelry garnished with precious stones, commented in her will that she had already given one of the girls a gold heart decorated with rubies to wear about her neck, which she was now bequeathing to her. Margery had obviously received great pleasure from the thought of her goddaughter wearing the jewel and wanted the girl to continue to do so after her death.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Barbara J. Harris, "Sisterhood, Friendship and the Power of English Aristocratic Women, 1450-1550" in *Women and Politics in Early Modern England, 1450-1700*, ed. James Daybell (Vermont: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 21.

<sup>36</sup> Harris, "English Aristocratic Women," 22.

<sup>37</sup> Harris, "English Aristocratic Women," 24.

Some women left their daughters jewels that would usually have gone to the eldest son as heirlooms. For example, in October 1558, Lady Anne Cobham bequeathed to her eldest daughter Katherine “a jewel set with diamonds, with a great pearl thereto appendant, three boxes of silver, a taglet of gold for a lace to a kirtle, two of my best wrought handkerchiefs, a piece of gold called a sovereign, and the best ring I have.” It is interesting to note that Lady Anne and her husband George Brooke, ninth Baron Cobham, had ten sons and four daughters and we know she is survived by at least two daughters and two sons because they are left legacies in her will. Curiously, however, Katherine’s bequest is listed first and her legacy appears superior to her brother Henry’s whose is listed next and who only received a cup of silver and two handkerchiefs.<sup>38</sup> Legacies such as these enriched women’s daughters at the expense of their eldest sons, who were expected to inherit these goods. Furthermore, such bequests served as financial safeguards for these women. Lady Cobham’s actions are one way women deviated from their devotion to the marital patrilineage characteristic of the culture in which they lived.

Due to England’s vast commercial expansion during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, new textiles, metals and precious stones became available to English men and women. Furthermore, with the Reformation leading to the sale of ex-monastic lands to the nobility and growing gentry classes, greater numbers of people had access to revenue than ever before. As a result, the elites in society had more opportunity for wasting money far in excess of that enjoyed by the medieval aristocracy. With more revenue

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<sup>38</sup> Will of Lady Anne Cobham, *Calendar of the Manuscripts of the Most Hon. the Marquis of Salisbury, Preserved at Hatfield House, Hertfordshire*, ed., S. R. Scargill-Bird, Vol. 1: 7 Oct 1558 (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1889), 147.

available and easier access to consumer goods, some of the lesser gentry and merchants found the means to dress in finery previously denied to them. The middling classes dressing in luxury materials like pearls clearly became a problem for the aristocracy as evidenced by the sumptuary legislation instituted in the period. The protection of social privilege and distinction was incredibly important at a time when money bought material goods that might blur the social boundaries.

Despite the booming domestic and international markets, ready money was still difficult to come by for an aristocracy that consistently lived beyond its means. Thus, the early modern period was largely a culture based on credit. As we have seen, not only did gemstones function as a mark of social status, these jewels also functioned as currency in the economy of the day. Furthermore, precious stones represented a family's investments and could ensure the economic well-being of future generations.

CHAPTER 3:  
BEJEWELED MAJESTY – QUEEN ELIZABETH I,  
PRECIOUS STONES AND STATECRAFT

In the early modern period, attitudes toward rulership were dominated by a patriarchal worldview that had built upon centuries of reservations about female rule and authority. Simply put, a woman in power violated natural and divine law. More specifically, as sixteenth century Protestant reformer John Knox claimed, women were incapable of effective rule, for “nature . . . doth paynt them furthe to be weake, fraile, impacient, feble and foolish: and experience hath declared them to be unconstant, variable, cruell, and lacking the spirit of counsel and regiment.”<sup>1</sup> Given such views on female rule, sovereign women who ruled in their own right faced challenges unknown to their male counterparts. Thus, when Elizabeth I ascended the throne she not only had to negotiate the deep-seated criticisms leveled against female rule, she also had to validate her legitimacy, and gain the loyalty of her subjects.

While Elizabeth no doubt believed in her absolute authority and had supporters who shared this view, she nevertheless recognized that many of her contemporaries upheld the patriarchal opinion of female rule. In a speech to Parliament three days after her sister Mary’s death, Elizabeth acknowledged the “weak” nature of woman when she told the Council that “the Law of Nature moveth mee to sorrowe for my Sister, the burthen that is fallen upon me maketh me amazed.” But she did not stop there. “And yet,” she continued, “considering I am Gods Creature, ordeyned to obey his appointment I will thereto Yelde, desiringe from the bottom of my harte that I may have assistance of

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<sup>1</sup> John Knox, *The First Blast of the Trumpet Against the Monstrous Regiment of Women*, ed. Edward Arber (London: Oxford University, 1878), 12.

his Grace to bee the minister of his Heavenly Will in this office now commytted to me.” She then proceeded to make an important distinction: she had “but one Bodye naturallye Considered”, but through God she had also taken on “a Bodye Politique to Gouverne.”<sup>2</sup> With these words Elizabeth referred to her woman’s body even while overcoming it by emphasizing that her rule was ordained by God.

Only days into her reign Elizabeth showed a keen awareness of the underlying tensions accompanying a woman’s ascension to the throne, yet she was able to deftly vocalize her own sense of her identity as a monarch. Throughout her reign Queen Elizabeth remained acutely aware of male anxieties over her female sovereignty and she employed various political and symbolic measures to support and maintain her royal authority. One of these measures included her appropriation of precious stones as tools of statecraft. Elizabeth used gemstones not only to create an image of royal authority in person and in portraiture, but also as a means of asserting her sovereignty and affirming and consolidating the political loyalty of her subjects.

Clearly, Elizabeth was not a monarch unique in her passion for luxurious jewels and clothing. In fact, for her father Henry VIII, jewelry and rich clothing were also an essential part of his image. While Henry’s extravagance reached a grand scale and made his commanding presence even more impressive, at the end of the day he was a male ruler and as such not viewed as a disruptive element to the power of rulership. A disruption in England’s reign of traditional male monarchy did occur, however, with the accession of Henry’s daughter and Elizabeth’s half-sister Mary in August 1553. Like her

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<sup>2</sup> Stow MS 361, fol. 1, British Museum, London, quoted in Allison Heisch, “Queen Elizabeth I: Parliamentary Rhetoric and the Exercise of Power,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 1 (1975), 33. The medieval concept of the king’s two bodies is examined in detail by Ernst H. Kantorowicz in *The King’s Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Political Theology*.

father, Mary inherited the Tudor love for display in jewelry – a love remarked upon by those who saw the Queen. For example, in 1554, Venetian ambassador Giacomo Soranzo reported to the Senate how Mary “seems to delight above all in arraying herself elegantly and magnificently ... She also makes great use of jewels, wearing them both on her chaperon [hood] and round her neck, and as trimming her gowns in jewels she delights greatly, and although she has plenty of them left by her predecessors, yet were she better supplied with money than she is, she would doubtless buy many more.”<sup>3</sup>

Clearly, through the decadence of Henry’s court and the lavish displays of her sister, Elizabeth was met with many examples of the influence jewelry could have upon the public. She realized, however, as a queen regnant she needed to concern herself with more than simply conveying the prosperity and stability of England. Although Mary set the precedent as the first crowned queen regnant of England, her reign was a short one – only lasting five years. Moreover, Mary eagerly sought marriage as soon as she took the throne, and less than a year into her rule, she married Philip II, future King of Spain. In contrast, Elizabeth’s reign lasted four decades longer and she did not marry despite the machinations of her advisors. Faced with issues during her long tenure as queen concerning her right to rule, her female body, and her marital status, Elizabeth was keenly aware of the importance of self-definition and self-presentation. Using precious stones to aid in the fashioning of her public image was a way for Elizabeth to support and maintain her royal authority and sovereignty.

As a female queen and a queen ruling without a husband, it is not surprising that Elizabeth’s appearance would be the topic of conversation for many people both inside

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<sup>3</sup> Report of England made to the Senate by Giacomo Soranzo, *State Papers and Manuscripts relating to English Affairs, existing in the Archives and Collections of Venice*, Vol 5, 1534-1554. Ed. Rawdon Brown (London: Longman & Co., 1873), 532.

and outside of England. Even before she ascended the throne descriptions of her physical appearance were recorded in letters and spread to foreign courts. In May 1557, Giovanni Michiel's report to the Venetian Doge and Senate described Elizabeth as "comely rather than handsome, but she is tall and well-formed, with a good skin, although swarthy, she has fine eyes."<sup>4</sup> A little over a decade into her reign, Baron Caspar von Breuner, an Imperial envoy in England for the Archduke Charles of Austria, wrote back to his liege: "I believe that there is no Princess of her compeers who can match her in wisdom, virtue, beauty and splendor of figure and form."<sup>5</sup>

While these descriptions of the Queen are favorable, this would not be the case throughout her entire reign, especially as Elizabeth aged. In 1597, Monsieur de Maisse, an agent of Henri IV, described the Queen at age sixty-four. He writes that her face "appears to be very aged. It is long and thin, and her teeth are very yellow and unequal." Yet, Elizabeth still impressed de Maisse for he concludes with "her figure is fair and tall and graceful in whatever she does."<sup>6</sup> Although Elizabeth would not have been privy to these men's private correspondence, she no doubt knew she would be a topic of discussion as the Queen of England and an unmarried female monarch. As such, Elizabeth understood not only the importance of cultivating an image that evinced majesty and power, but one that attracted the admiration of her subjects and foreign

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<sup>4</sup> Rawdon Brown, ed., *Calendar of State Papers and Manuscripts, relating to English affairs, existing in the archives and collections of Venice and in other libraries of Northern Italy*. Vol VI, part II 1556-1557 (London, 1881), 1058.

<sup>5</sup> Victor Klarwill, ed., *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners, being a series of hitherto unpublished letters from the archives of the Hapsburg family*. (London: John Lane the Bodley Head, Ltd., 1928), 78.

<sup>6</sup> De Maisse, *A Journal of all that was accomplished by Monsieur de Maisse, Ambassador in England from King Henry IV to Queen Elizabeth*, trans. and ed. G.B. Harrison and R.A. Jones (London: The Nonesuch Press, 1931), 25-6.



courts. The strategic use of gemstones and jewels helped Elizabeth create this image of royal splendor and authority throughout her forty-four year reign.

One way Elizabeth attracted the interest and admiration of visiting foreign dignitaries was through her extravagant décor. In 1559, during marriage negotiations between Archduke Charles of Austria and Elizabeth, Baron von Breuner wrote to the Archduke: “I have seen several very fine summer residences that belong to her, in two of which I have been myself, and I may say that there are none in the world so richly garnished with costly furniture of silk, adorned with gold, pearls and precious stones. Then she has some twenty other houses, all of which might justly be called royal summer residences. Hence she is well worth the trouble.”<sup>7</sup> As von Breuner’s report suggests, the grandeur and opulence evident in the precious stones and gilt furniture that filled Elizabeth’s castles was enough of a testament to Elizabeth and England’s wealth to deem her a worthy marriage prospect.

Elizabeth, however, had a different outlook on her eligibility for marriage and she definitely gave Breuner and the Archduke “trouble” when it came to her feelings about the topic. Breuner had already had three audiences with the Queen, but had yet to receive any answer to the Archduke’s proposal of marriage. Breuner writes that the Queen “has not forsworn marriage ... but she could not at the moment come to any resolution and so was also unwilling to bind herself for the future.”<sup>8</sup> After months at the English court and several more visits with the Queen on behalf of his Prince, Elizabeth left no doubt in Bruener’s mind “that if she ever married, she would do so only for the profit and weal of

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<sup>7</sup> Klarwill, *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners*, 78.

<sup>8</sup> Klarwill, *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners*, 78.

her realm.”<sup>9</sup> Breuner could not have been more correct, for in 1565 a representative of the Archduke asked Elizabeth to relinquish a beautiful ruby ring she wore to be given to Charles as a token of her favor. Apparently, Elizabeth did not perceive a match with the Archduke of Austria as being in the best interest of her country for she refused to give up her jewel. However, she attempted to soften the snub by declaring how she longed for Charles to visit so they could further negotiations between themselves. Knowing of Elizabeth’s ambivalence toward marriage, one wonders if she refused in an attempt to dissuade the interests of the Archduke. Regardless of her reason, her refusal to relinquish the jewel reveals how Elizabeth used precious stones to establish her authority in matters of marriage; she would not be forced into a decision and she would choose on whom to bestow favors. Charles refused to wait indefinitely for Elizabeth’s declaration and he withdrew his suit a few years later and sought marriage elsewhere.<sup>10</sup>

Along with generating an image of power and wealth through richly furnished estates, it was crucial for Elizabeth to pay close attention to the crafting of her public persona. This became particularly important as the Queen aged and remained unmarried with no successor named. As her reign progressed, the Queen became increasingly sensitive concerning her personal appearance. John Clapham, assistant to the Queen’s close advisor William Cecil, writes that when Elizabeth would show herself in public “she was always magnificent in apparel, supposing haply thereby, that the eyes of her

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<sup>9</sup> Klarwill, *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners*, 122.

<sup>10</sup> Carole Levin, *The Heart and Stomach of a King: Elizabeth I and the Politics of Sex and Power* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994), 53.

people, being dazzled with the glittering aspect of those accidental ornaments would not so easily discern the marks of age and decay of natural beauty.”<sup>11</sup>

As Elizabeth aged, the role of precious stones became invaluable to her creation of ageless and unfading beauty. Moreover, Elizabeth remained very aware of the importance of being on physical display. Echoing Clapham, Francis Bacon remarked after her death that Elizabeth “imagined that the people, who are much influenced by externals, would be diverted, by the glitter of her jewels, from noticing the decay of her personal attractions.”<sup>12</sup> Despite Bacon’s skeptical attitude, contemporary accounts of the Queen suggest her strategic use of precious stones was successful. In fact, the jewels she wore appeared to have a dazzling affect on those who saw the Queen. After an audience with the Queen in 1595, Herr Johann Jacob Breuning von Buchenbach, a German envoy sent to England by Duke Frederick of Württemberg recorded seeing Elizabeth “dressed in a silver robe and adorned with magnificent gems and jewels beyond compare. On her head she wore a royal crown of pearls.”<sup>13</sup> Another German visiting England in 1598 described the Queen in procession on her way to chapel at Greenwich. He noted that “she had in her ears two pearls, with very rich drops . . . upon her head she had a small crown . . . and she had on a necklace of exceeding fine jewels.”<sup>14</sup> These public outings presented Elizabeth with an opportune occasion for self-display and she made sure that she was seen. This was especially important on progresses of the Queen in which her elaborate silks and rich jewelry created the image of an earthly goddess gracing the

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<sup>11</sup> John Clapham, *Elizabeth of England: certain observations concerning the life and reign of Queen Elizabeth*, ed. Evelyn Plummer Read and Conyers Read (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951), 86.

<sup>12</sup> Cited in Agnes Strickland, *Lives of the Queens of England, from the Norman Conquest*, vol. 6, *Elizabeth, Second Queen-Regnant of England and Ireland* (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1847), 172.

<sup>13</sup> Klarwill, *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners*, 366.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Hentzner, *Travels in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth*, [http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/hent\\_naun/hentzner\\_naunton.pdf](http://www2.hn.psu.edu/faculty/jmanis/hent_naun/hentzner_naunton.pdf).

people with her presence. Furthermore, an added benefit of this self-display meant that her subjects or visiting travelers would speak or write about what they saw, and this image of majesty Elizabeth created would be disseminated throughout the realm and to other royal courts.

These jewels and her magnificent wardrobe also seemed to give the Queen the appearance of youth and vitality. In the last decade of her reign an envoy from the Duke of Württemberg states that despite her age she could “in grace and beauty vie with a maiden of sixteen years,” and Sir Anthony Standen, courtier and observer at the Twelfth Night Revels for 1594, muses that she appeared as beautiful to his old sight as ever he had seen her.<sup>15</sup> Although de Maisse commented on Elizabeth’s aged face and yellow teeth in 1597, it appears that she successfully affected an image of rejuvenation that captured the eyes and minds of her subjects and foreign visitors.

Queen Elizabeth “was a true lover of jewels and pearls, all sorts of precious stones” and the vast quantity of jewelry she inherited from her father was quite a collection.<sup>16</sup> To her great delight, she did not have long to wait before her collection expanded due to the many gifts she received from her subjects and visiting foreign dignitaries. Gift exchange between Elizabeth and select subjects occurred annually on New Year’s Day. At this time, courtiers, bishops, and members of the queen’s household presented gifts to the queen who in return gave presents often in the form of gilt plate, cloth, and the occasional jewel. Detailed records of these gift exchanges were recorded

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<sup>15</sup> Klarwill, *Queen Elizabeth and Some Foreigners*, 349; Thomas Birch, *Memoires of the Reign of Queen Elizabeth, From the Year 1581 till her Death*. Vol 1 (London, 1754), 146.

<sup>16</sup> Edmund Bohun, *The Character of Queen Elizabeth, or, A full and clear account of her policies, and the methods of her government both in church and state her virtue and defects, together with the characters of her principal ministers of state, and the greatest part of the affairs and events that happened in her times* (London, 1693), 342.

on Gift Rolls. Each gift was recorded with the name and rank of the donor as well as the name of the person in whose custody the gift was being entrusted. These Rolls were then stored in the Jewel House at the Tower of London. A monarch would also present gifts and these were recorded on the back of the Gift Rolls along with their value.<sup>17</sup> Over the course of her reign, Elizabeth received a variety of gifts ranging from purses filled with money to hundreds of presents of cloth, clothing, accessories and jewels.

Politics were deeply imbedded in the network of gift exchange at Elizabeth's court. Both men and women actively participated in this customary exchange of gifts that mutually bound the Queen to her subject.<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth's well-known love of jewelry led many of her courtiers to use gifts of jewels as a means of currying favor. As a result, they all sought to present the queen with the most unique or rarest of jewels and the New Year's Gift Rolls are filled with list upon list of costly jewels encrusted with precious stones: the Earl of Ormond gave Elizabeth "a fayer juell of golde, being a phenex, the winges fully garnished with rubyes and small diamonds, and at the fete thre feyer diamonds and two smaller; in the top a branche garnished with six small diamonds, thre small rubyes, and 3 very meane perle, and in the bottome thre perles pendant" and Sir Henry Sydney, Lord Deputy of Ireland, gave "a feyer juell of golde, with a Dyana, fully garnished wythe dyamonds, one biggar than the rest, three rubyes, two pearles, and a pearle pendante; the backsyde a ship."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Nancy Armstrong, *Jewellery* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1973), 91.

<sup>18</sup> Catherine L. Howey, "Fashioning Monarchy: Women, Dress, and Power at the Court of Elizabeth I, 1558-1603," in *The Rule of Women in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Anne J. Cruz and Mihoko Suzuki (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2009), 143.

<sup>19</sup> Karen Larsdatter, *New Year's Gifts for Queen Elizabeth*, Gift Rolls for 1577-8 and 1578-9, <http://www.larsdatter.com/gifts>.

Clearly, these courtiers spared no expense when deciding upon a gift for Elizabeth. And while the extravagance of these jewels comes across from their description in the Gift Rolls, some of the jewels presented to Elizabeth hint at a more intimate relationship between courtier and queen. Sir Christopher Hatton, Captain of the Guard and one of the Queen's favorites, gave "a jewel of gold, wherein is a dog leading a man over a bridge, the body fully garnished with small diamonds and rubies."<sup>20</sup> According to sixteenth century bestiaries (illustrated volumes describing various animals and birds along with an interpretation of the moral significance each animal was thought to embody) the dog was an animal that displayed "marvelous perseverance and sharp sense to know who doth him good or who doth him the contrary ... Therefore upon his Master he commonly fawneth: to strangers he is eager to curse." Furthermore, "of all beasts living with us and amongst us, [the dog is] of most assurance, trust and faith."<sup>21</sup> Given the close relationship Hatton shared with the queen, his jewel of a dog leading a man may have been a way for Hatton to symbolically represent his unwavering devotion to his "master" as well as the loyalty and faith he placed in his Queen.

Katherine Howard, Countess of Nottingham, a gentlewoman of the privy chamber and a member of the extended royal family (her father Henry Carey was Elizabeth's first cousin) gave "a jewel of gold, being a cat, and mice playing with her, garnished with small diamonds and pearl."<sup>22</sup> The significance of the cat in early modern literature reveals an animal that is depicted as female and that is considered to be "warie or wise". Moreover, the cat is "in her trade and manner of living very shamefast."<sup>23</sup> According to

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<sup>20</sup> Larsdatter, *New Year's Gifts*, Gift Rolls for 1577-8, <http://www.larsdatter.com/gifts>.

<sup>21</sup> John Maplet. *A Greene Forest, or A Naturall Historie* (London, 1567), 82-3.

<sup>22</sup> Larsdatter, *New Year's Gifts*, Gift Rolls for 1581-2, <http://www.larsdatter.com/gifts>

<sup>23</sup> Maplet. *A Greene Forest* (London, 1567), 77.

the Oxford English Dictionary, being shamefast in the sixteenth century was to be “modest or virtuous in behavior and character.”<sup>24</sup> Thus, by gifting a jewel depicting a cat, the Countess symbolically represented the Queen’s wise and virtuous nature, an image that Elizabeth herself worked to portray throughout her reign. Furthermore, the Countess’ close relationship with Elizabeth meant that she was well acquainted with the Queen’s personality and the way she interacted with those around her. Thus, the image of a cat playing with mice might have been a clever metaphor on Elizabeth’s own dealings with those at her court.

Another personalized gift came from Katherine Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon who gave the Queen “one green frog, the back of emeralds, small and great.”<sup>25</sup> Although not family, the Countess of Huntingdon was also a gentlewoman of the privy chamber and the sister of Sir Robert Dudley, a favorite of Elizabeth’s. Her gift of a jewel encrusted frog attests to the close relationship she had with Queen. The Countess presented Elizabeth with the jewel in 1581, one of the last years in which Elizabeth considered marriage negotiations with the French Duke of Alençon (later Duke of Anjou). Elizabeth affectionately referred to the Duke as her “frog,” a special name with which the Countess would have been familiar given her intimate association with the Queen. Despite the fact that these gifts came from courtiers within Elizabeth’s inner circle and had the added personal flair or playfulness that goes along with such a familiar relationship, these presents also had the benefit of creating a tie that served to curry favor between subject and monarch.

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<sup>24</sup> OED Online. November 2010. Oxford University Press. <http://0-www.oed.com.library.unl.edu/view/Entry/177413?redirectedFrom=shamefast>.

<sup>25</sup> Larsdatter, *New Year’s Gifts*, Gift Rolls for 1581-2, <http://www.larsdatter.com/gifts>.

The system of courtly gift exchange became pivotal in the construction of the Queen's public image and in her relationships with her subjects. In several of her state portraits and miniatures, Elizabeth is frequently painted with jewels that functioned as symbols and were used by Elizabeth to construct her image of royal authority and sovereignty. Elizabeth and her government ensured her portraits circulated within England and throughout foreign courts, for it was important that Elizabeth's contemporaries view her as the equal to, and sharing the royal and quasi-imperial attributes of, her European rivals.<sup>26</sup>

Aside from lavishing her with gifts to gain favor, her courtiers also contributed to Elizabeth's symbolic arsenal of jewelry many of which are visible in her portraits. At a New Year's gift exchange in 1573, Lady Ann Woodhouse presented the Queen with "a juell being a dyall, and a pellycane with three byrds, sett in golde with an emeralde, smale, rubyes and dymondes being broken."<sup>27</sup> In mythology, the pelican is recorded as plucking its own breast to shed its blood in order to save its young. Thus, the pelican symbolized Elizabeth's willingness to sacrifice herself for her subjects; a symbol that Lady Woodhouse would know would please the Queen.<sup>28</sup> A New Year's gift to the Queen in 1575 is recorded as "a small ring of gold, with a phenex of ophall, and a rose of VIII smale rubyes" and at New Year's in 1585 Lord Howard of Effingham, the Lord Admiral, gave Elizabeth "a juell of Golde being an Armlett" and in the center "Affenix of golde garnished with Opalls and Smale sparks of Rubyes on the one side."<sup>29</sup> As a

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<sup>26</sup>Maurice Howard, "Elizabeth I: A Sense of Place in Stone, Print and Paint" in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Sixth Series, Vol. 14 (2004), 262.pp. 261-268

<sup>27</sup>Howey, "Fashioning Monarchy," 147.

<sup>28</sup>Roy Strong, *Gloriana: the Portraits of Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), 83.

<sup>29</sup>Larsdatter, *New Year's Gifts*, <http://www.larsdatter.com/gifts>. Example of New Year's gift is from the year 1575-6; BL, Sloane MS 814, f.31<sup>v</sup> as cited in Strong, *Gloriana*, 12.



sixteenth century emblem, the phoenix symbolized resurrection and regeneration. It is a mythological bird that never dies but after 500 years is consumed by fire and reborn again. Only one phoenix lived at a time thus it symbolized Elizabeth's uniqueness and the longevity of her reign. With this emblem the unmarried and childless Elizabeth could calm people's fears about the succession by proclaiming through the symbol of the phoenix that the monarchy would not die with her.<sup>30</sup>

Elizabeth also received jewels bearing moons. In 1587, Sir Francis Drake gave her a fan of red and white feathers "the Handle of Golde inamuled with a half moone or Mother of perles, within that A halfe moone garnished with Sparcks of Dyamonds ... hauing her Maiesties picture within it," and Lord Effingham, gave her "a carkyoneet of golde, like halfe moons, garnished with sparks of rubyes and diamonds."<sup>31</sup> Jewels adorned with moons symbolized the moon goddess Diana whose prime influence was over waters, whether oceans or rivers. This was an appropriate symbol for Elizabeth's power over the seas and oceans after the defeat of the Armada and at a time when England's privateers were inflicting huge damage on Spanish shipping. Diana also symbolized chastity, thus the moon emblem became significant in Elizabeth's later years when it became obvious she would not marry.<sup>32</sup> As evidenced by the numerous symbolic gifts of jewels that Elizabeth received, her courtiers were well aware of Elizabeth's strategies of self-presentation and assisted her in implementing them. Clearly, with such magnificent gemstone encrusted jewels at her disposal, Elizabeth created a majestic setting with these brilliant jewels and her gorgeous dress.

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<sup>30</sup> Howey, "Fashioning Monarchy," 148.

<sup>31</sup> BL, Sloane MS 814, f. 33<sup>v</sup>, 34<sup>v</sup> as cited in Strong, *Gloriana*, 125; John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth*, vol. II (London: John Nichols and Son, 1823), 498.

<sup>32</sup> Strong, *Gloriana*, 126; Susan Doran, *Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: New York University Press, 2003), 124.

Not only did Elizabeth receive gifts that reinforced her public image, but she also gave gifts that symbolized the traits she proclaimed as hers, thus creating a circulation of symbolic jewels at court. For example, in 1573 Elizabeth received from Lady Mary Sidney a “juell of golde, wherin is a pellycane garnished with smale rubyes and diamondes, hanging by a small chaeyne, and one perle pendaunte.” Elizabeth then gave this jewel to the Countess of Huntington.<sup>33</sup> It is unlikely that Elizabeth gave away her jewels because she was displeased with them since they were the symbols, in jewel form, that she used to bolster her monarchical image. Just as courtiers could use symbolic jewelry to signal to Elizabeth that they would be useful allies in the creation of her public personae, Elizabeth could further reinforce the notion that she needed her subjects to help her in this enterprise. This circulation of jewelry mutually bound givers to receivers, creating a sense that both were invested in the well-being of the other.<sup>34</sup>

Given the mixed feelings of many individuals during the sixteenth century about female monarchs, it is not surprising that Elizabeth felt the need to pay such close attention to the crafting of her public persona both in person and in portraiture. The jewels Elizabeth wore made a strong statement not only about her, but also to the world at large about the wealth of the English nation. Aware of the importance of attracting the admiration of her subjects and foreign courts Elizabeth took special pains when it came to her physical appearance and creating her public image. In order for England to be seen as an economic, diplomatic and cultural equal among its European neighbors it not only needed a brilliant and intellectual monarch at the helm, but also needed to project an image of wealth and sophistication. The accession of Elizabeth to the throne took care of

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<sup>33</sup> Nichols, *Progresses*, 324.

<sup>34</sup> Howey, “Fashioning Monarchy,” 148.

the former and her strategic use of precious stones aided in the latter. Although precious stones enhanced her dress and added to her dazzling image, Elizabeth realized that jewels could act as more than just a fashion accessory, they were tools that could convey the prosperity and stability of England and her monarch. Through the jewels that she bought, received or gifted, Elizabeth created the image of a female monarch that not only portrayed those principles for which the Queen and her government stood, but also conveyed the Queen's ability to rule on her own.

## CONCLUSION

In societies, past or present, material goods are powerful symbols that can express and define social relations, influence the development of technology, determine the legitimacy of political systems, and provide ways for people to understand their world. Knowing about people's possessions is crucial to understanding their experience of daily life, the way they saw themselves in relation to their peers and their responses to and interactions with the social, cultural, and economic structures and processes that made up the societies in which they lived.

From the earliest times people have infused gems and stones with significance beyond their intrinsic properties. Precious stones have been emblems of personal wealth and sources of magical and medicinal powers. They have also played important roles in commerce, art, religion, and politics of past civilizations. Because stones influence the social, economic, and religious spheres they are excellent tools for studying diverse aspects of the cultural history of a society. Furthermore, the values and attitudes embodied in stones and gems are socially constructed and their use is part of a society's cultural system. This system is something that varies from society to society and changes from century to century. Therefore, examining the cultural significance of precious stones provides us with unique insight into the motivations, aspirations, fears, and dreams of past cultures.

Precious stones have had an undeniably colorful influence on Renaissance history. As this thesis demonstrates, the prominent placement of precious stones upon the lavish garments of society's elite reveals not only their potential to embellish, but reveal outwardly their wearer's personal circumstances and convictions. Jewels were

both private possessions and public pronouncements, worn so that they would be seen and interpreted. They spoke to contemporaries of political loyalties, social and economic standing and of cultural ambition. There existed multiple functions for Renaissance jewelry. The most obvious of these functions is the role jewelry played as a display of wealth. As rare materials, often difficult to find and imported across great distances, gems were inherently valuable in the English economy. Thus, to wear such pieces was an overt presentation of one's financial standing or aspirations. Jewelry was also a practical investment. At times, it served as actual currency, paid to courtiers in exchange for their loyalty and often pawned or sold for ready money.

The wealth of material published during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries on the properties of precious stones indicates a widespread conviction in their value. The fact that several of the properties attributed to precious stones involved powers and cures against witchcraft, poison, and illness indicates that these issues deeply concerned individuals of Elizabethan and early Stuart society. Furthermore, tracking the fate of gems through early modern English society offers insight into this period's cultural beliefs and practices.

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