WHERE DID THE JEWELS OF THE GERMAN IMPERIAL PRINCES COME FROM? ASPECTS OF MATERIAL CULTURAL IN THE EMPIRE

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Jewellery and precious stones are omnipresent among the accoutrements of European rulers. They have left their traces in pictures, texts and, more rarely, in surviving objects. We encounter them as pieces of jewellery worn or stored in coffers, as embellishments for garments and precious ecclesiastical objects, as pledges, modes of payment or gifts. A painting by Bernhard Strigel manages to capture the self-assurance with which the Habsburgs wore their jewels (See illus. 1). The picture, which was painted after 1515, shows Emperor Maximilian I (1459–1519) and his family: next to the emperor we see his first wife, Mary of Burgundy (1457–82), between them their son Philip the Handsome (1478–1506), in front at left Maximilian’s

1 Kunsthistorisches Museum Vienna, Bernhard Strigel (1460–1528), Family of Emperor Maximilian I, after 1515, Inv. no. 832. At the time when the picture was painted, Mary of Burgundy had already been dead for more than thirty years. The painting was commissioned by the emperor to commemorate the 1515 double betrothal in Vienna which sealed the alliance through marriage of the Habsburgs with the Jagiellon royal family. Cf. Sylvia Ferino-Pagden, Wolfgang Prohasta and Karl Schütz, Die Gemäldegalerie des Kunsthistorischen Museums in Wien. Verzeichnis der Gemälde (Vienna, 1991), plate 571, text p. 117; Ausstellung Maximilian I, Innsbruck, ed. E. Egg (Innsbruck, 1969); Wilfried Seipel and Leopold Auer (ed.), Kaiser Ferdinand I, 1503–64. Das Werden der Habsburgermonarchie (Vienna, 2003), 77, 335. As yet we have no study of the Habsburg jewels comparable to that by Diana Scarisbrick for the Tudors or Paola Venturelli for the Sforzas in Milan. See, however, Orsolya Réthelyi et al. (ed.), Mary of Hungary. The Queen and Her Court, 1521–31 (Budapest, 2005), esp. 121–8; Paola Venturelli, Gioielli e gioiellieri milanesi. Storia, arte, moda, 1450–1630 (Milan, 1996); Diana Scarisbrick, Tudor and Jacobean Jewellery (London, 1995); Victoria & Albert Museum (ed.), Princely Magnificence. Court Jewels of the Renaissance, 1500–1630 (London, 1980); Anna Somers Cocks, An Introduction to Courtly Jewellery (London, 1980). Thus far, the study of jewels has been the province mainly of jewellery historians with an art historical orientation. Cf. Joan Evans, A History of Jewellery, 100–1870 (London, 1953); J. Anderson Black, The History of Jewelry. Five Thousand Years (New York, 1974); Yvonne Hackenbroch, Renaissance Jewellery (London/Munich, 1979); Hugh Tait (ed.), Seven Thousand Years of Jewellery (London, 1986); Ronald W. Lightbown, Mediaeval European Jewellery. With a Catalogue of the Collection in the Victoria & Albert Museum (London, 1992). For more on research recent trends, see Lia Lenti and Dora Liscia Bemporad (ed.), Gioielli in Italia. Tradizione e novità del gioiello italiano dal XVI al XX secolo (Venice, 1999), and ead. (ed.), Gioielli in Italia. Sacro e profano dall’antichità ai giorni nostri. Atti del convegno di studio (Venice, 2001).
two grandsons, the future emperors Ferdinand I (1503–64) and Charles V (1500–58), and at right Louis II (1506–26), heir to the kingdoms of Hungary and Bohemia. All members of the family wear precious jewellery without appearing overdressed. Particularly striking is Mary of Burgundy’s splendid pendant, hanging from a finely woven chain, with a large red precious stone in the middle. The young Louis also wears an elaborate pendant, adorned with a large, sparkling bluish stone and a massive pearl. Emperor Maximilian, his son Philip and his grandson Charles wear the chain of the Order of the Golden Fleece with the symbolic pendant in the form of a sheepskin. Charles’ and Philip’s hat brooches also stand out. Charles’ bonnet is adorned with a cameo of dark stone surrounded by pearls.\(^2\)

The painting provides a first impression of the Habsburg jewels. Without according them undue attention, the artist allows the jewels to embellish their wearers as a matter of course. They are well placed but not dominant, precious but not excessively large. The Habsburg jewels are also documented in various inventories. The 1524 jewellery inventory of Archduke Ferdinand, for example, lists numerous valuable pieces of jewellery and precious stones. They include a cloak pin studded with emeralds, turquoise, rubies, diamonds and pearls, a cross pendant with diamonds and pearls, and a ‘picture of St George with thirty-three diamonds and twelve rubies and seven emeralds’.\(^3\) These treasures have not survived, to be sure, but some very similar pieces have. There is a St George pendant in the Green Vault in Dresden, for example (see illus. 2). Fashioned of gold and enamel and studded with diamonds, rubies and emeralds, this late sixteenth-century pendant shows Saint George battling the dragon.\(^4\) The 1547 inventory of jewellery belonging to Ferdinand’s wife, Anne of Hungary and Bohemia, lists several dozen items. Among other pieces, she owned a jewel with a ‘splendid large table-cut diamond, encrusted all around, and with a fine ruby globe above with a pendant pearl’\(^5\) (see illus. 3).

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\(^3\) *Jahrbuch der Kunsthistorischen Sammlungen des allerhöchsten Kaiserhauses*, 2 (1884), no. 1511, ciii–cvi, ciii.
