

Thumb Rings



#2000-0208 Grayson Collection
Archer's Thumb Ring (possibly a replica)
China
Shang - Zhou Dynasty
Jade



#2001-01-084 Grayson Collection
Archer's Thumb Ring
Nubian, Northern Sudan
1st Century A.D.
Granite

This thumb ring was recovered from a slag heap at the site of the ancient city of Meroë, capital of the Nubian kingdom of Kush from about 538 B.C. to 350 A.D.

We often in our every day lives see objects or items of clothing on a person that make us think, "Wow, that person must be important." Symbols of a person's standing in a hierarchy (such as social status, political status or military standing) have been found in cultures around the world since ancient times. One such symbol was the archer's thumb ring.

Six out of seven continents have some sort of archery tradition and in several cultures across the globe archer's thumb rings have served not only as a practical accessory to archery but also an important cultural symbol. As the bow and arrow developed in various regions of the world, a number of techniques were created for pulling the bowstring and releasing the arrow. Many Asian cultures historically used a technique called the "Mongolian release," where the string is drawn by the flexed thumb bent over the string, and the end of the forefinger assists in holding the thumb in position. This method was common in areas such as China, Japan, Korea, Persia, India, and North Africa. The Mongolian release necessitated the use of a thumb guard, usually in the form of a cylindrical or lipped ring, to protect from abrasion and assist in holding the string.

The earliest archers' rings found in an archaeological context are from Chinese burial sites. The oldest known example dates to the Shang Dynasty (1520 B.C. – 1030 B.C.) and are of carved jade. Chinese archers sometimes carried their thumb rings in small cylindrical cases, usually with an attached cord so that they could be suspended from the waist. Ring cases were made of materials such as wood, horn, ivory, silk over paper, and jade.



#2000-01-002 Grayson Collection
Thumb Ring Case
China
Qing Dynasty
Silk and paper; decorated with an appliqué floral design; tasseled silk cords.

Possibly the oldest archers' rings found outside of China are those excavated from archaeological sites in northern Africa. Silver thumb rings excavated from Nubian tombs are believed to be archer's rings and date to about A.D. 250-550.

While archers' thumb rings were made with a variety of materials such as precious and semi-precious stones, bone, ceramics, horn, wood, metal, and glass, it has been found that highly decorated rings were often made for ornamental purposes or as status symbols rather than for use in shooting the bow and arrow. They were the Gucci briefcases of the ancient world.

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- Log in as a "Guest."
- Enter search terms into one or more fields and click the "Perform Find" button in the status area on the left-hand side of the screen.
- Use the book icon in the status area to move from one record to another in the found set.
- Click on the magnifying glass icon to return to find mode and perform additional searches.
- When finished working with a database, please be sure to click the "Log Out" button in the status area to close your session.

EXPLORE

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Aspect of Society	Details and evidence that help us understand the aspect of society
Geography & Environment	
Government & Social Structure	
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Economy, Trade & Jobs	

Writing:

Observe: Examine the images in the article. What are three important details you observe in the images in the article? Elaborate by explaining why these details are important using evidence from the article to support your thinking.