

In January 2013 Scholars gathered in York to discuss an enigmatic sapphire ring found by a metal detectorist in 2009. The beaded gold piece, which is unlike any other in the museum's collection, may date to between the seventh and eleventh centuries A.D. "This beautiful ring has really got us puzzled," said Natalie McCaul, curator of archeology at the Yorkshire Museum. A jeweller who replicated the piece attended the meeting to explain how he remade the ring, and offered insights into how the original craftsman may have fashioned the unusual artefact.

In the medieval period, wearing sapphires was a privilege reserved for royalty, nobility, and high-ranking clergy. Then, as now, sapphires were thought to bring good fortune, mental clarity, and spiritual enlightenment to the wearer. The intricate gold beading combined with the use of sapphire on this ring found in York, England, could date it to the Viking period (tenth to eleventh centuries A.D.). However, the jewellery more likely dates to between the seventh and ninth centuries A.D. The use of gold inlaid with red and blue glass is typical of jewellery from East Anglia, a kingdom in eastern England first settled in the fifth century A.D. To make the ring more impressive and suitable for royalty, a jeweller used precious stones instead of red or blue glass.

The craftsmanship is very similar to some of the pieces found in The Staffordshire Horde for in July 2009, the largest-ever hoard of Anglo-Saxon gold found in a farmer's field in Staffordshire. Discovered by Terry Herbert, a metal detectorist, and then excavated by the Birmingham University Archaeology Unit, the hoard consists of more than 1,500 gold and silver items, all dating to the seventh century. The find is far larger than other significant Anglo-Saxon hoards, such as those discovered with the contemporaneous noble burials at Sutton Hoo in south eastern England. In the Staffordshire horde most of the artifacts are associated with warfare, including helmet fragments engraved with a frieze of running animals and elaborate gold sword hilts inlaid with garnets. In some cases, rivets were still attached to the hilt components, suggesting they were ripped off the weapons and hidden quickly.

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