

BY ANNA RUSSELL

NEW YORK gallery owner Sandra Hindman keeps the past close at hand. "I wear a 15th-century ring," she said. "I've worn it every day for 20 years, and I swim with it."

The option of wearing the object—despite the obvious risks—is one benefit of investing in the ancient jewelry Ms. Hindman will show in "Byzantium and the West: Jewelry in the First Millennium," opening Thursday at the Les Enluminures Gallery in New York. Then, on Dec. 5, Christie's will host its annual Ancient Jewelry auction, which includes Byzantine and medieval pieces as well as a wider variety of ancient items.

Byzantine jewelry "often incorporates crosses or other religious symbolism," said Molly Morse Limmer, head of antiquities at Christie's in New York, and some buyers wear the jewels

A collector loves the items' sense of history, but suggests taking them off for washing dishes.

to show their devotion. Others buy for weddings and renewal of vows, said Ms. Hindman, who once offered a ring that said on the inside "I will always love you" in medieval French. "It was bought for a 10th anniversary," she added.

As for the Byzantine-era objects, and their prices of often six figures, "there's not that much high-quality gold and jewelry from this era left," Ms. Limmer said. This year, Christie's expects a Byzantine necklace of gold, sapphire, emerald, garnet and pearl from the sixth to seventh century to sell for \$200,000 to \$300,000 at its auction in December. Christie's wants at least \$150,000 for a gold and precious-stone necklace and at least \$80,000 for a diadem, both also from the sixth to seventh centuries.

Last year's auction brought in nearly \$1.7 million, more than three times the levels when the Ancient Jewelry auction started in 1999. (Beyond the high-profile pieces, dealers described the general market as stable.)

The Byzantine Empire, centered in Constantinople (now Istanbul), en-



\$15,000-\$20,000

That's what Christie's is expecting Dec. 5 for this Byzantine gold and emerald necklace, circa 6th-7th century A.D.

Daring To Wear Ancient History



\$75,000

Les Enluminures Gallery is selling this Roman, mid-third century gold key ring. It's inscribed 'Use It With Luck.'



\$185,000

At Les Enluminures, the three-piece set for that price includes this Ostrogothic gold cross pendant, possibly from a Black Sea-area workshop.

ured past the first millennium as the eastern part of the Roman Empire. Byzantine jewelry, like its place of origin, is characterized by the influence of Greek culture and Orthodox Christianity.

A prized piece of Ms. Hindman's show, which includes more than 40 items, is a matching early sixth-century set including a gold necklace with a pendant cross, two pairs of pearl earrings, and two finger rings, priced together at \$395,000. A sixth-to-seventh-century gold pectoral cross is \$190,000.

Art fairs such as New York's Winter Antiques Show, in January and the March TEFAF fair in Maastricht, the Netherlands, are another source of ancient jewelry. A number of galleries specialize as well. Maureen Zarembor of New York's Tambaran Gallery is currently selling two pre-Columbian pendants—a monkey and a frog—both from A.D. 600 to 900 and priced at \$135,000 to \$150,000. She says she sold Byzantine rings to Andy Warhol and ancient beads to Audrey Hepburn, and recalls how socialite Dodie Rosekrans bought many ancient items, mixing them layer on layer with modern counterparts.

With pieces as old as these, the issue of where an item comes from can be "sort of tricky" for collectors and museums, said Yvonne J. Markowitz, curator of jewelry at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, adding, "Anything that's recently excavated belongs to the country in which it was found." Lincoln Sander, executive director of the Antiques Dealers' Association of America, advises researching dealers and requesting a detailed receipt.

Ms. Limmer, Ms. Zarembor and Ms. Hindman say they pay strict attention to provenance, checking with experts, though Ms. Limmer of Christie's said it's often difficult to trace: "What was made in one country may have been buried in a tomb in another." Ms. Zarembor and Ms. Hindman said no country or individual had laid claim to an ancient piece they had sold, and Ms. Zarembor says she buys only pieces that have been in the U.S. a long time.

But if the paperwork is in order, it can be party time. New York contemporary-art dealer Peter Freeman has repeatedly bought medieval jewelry from Ms. Hindman, and it didn't stay unworn. He loves the items' sense of history: "a whole world that can be in a ring." But he added, "It's not a piece you wash dishes in."