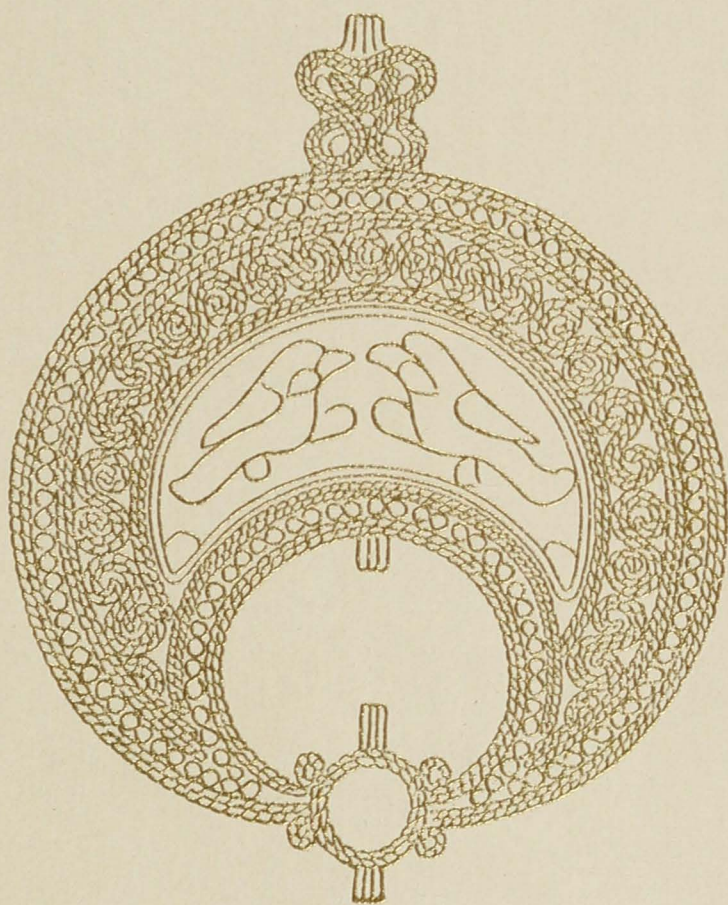


NEAR EASTERN JEWELRY



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A PICTURE BOOK
THE METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
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NEAR EASTERN JEWELRY

THE arts of the goldsmith and of the jeweler were already highly developed in the earliest periods of the ancient Near East. The jewelry of Queen Shubad and her ladies-in-waiting (see fig. 1), from the excavations of royal tombs at Ur in Mesopotamia, dating from a period between 3500 and 2800 B.C., reveal all the splendor and richness of Sumerian jewelry. The headdresses of Queen Shubad and the court ladies were particularly rich. Strings of lapis lazuli and carnelian beads were often decorated with gold-leaf pendants, which are rendered surprisingly naturalistically, resembling leaves of a beech tree, as in figure 1, or willow leaves.

A great period of oriental jewelry was reached in Iran under the rule of the Achaemenid kings (549-331 B.C.). Magnificent armlets, bracelets, and torques, showing great elegance of form, are often inlaid entirely or in part with lapis lazuli and turquoise, set either in cut-out cavities or in applied cloisons (*orfèvrerie cloisonnée*).

Contemporary with the Achaemenian jewelry of Iran are the gold objects of the Scythian tribes, known from finds in western Siberia and South Russia. These objects are decorated in an animal style which is quite different from that of Mesopotamia and Achaemenid Iran. In this Museum is an interesting group of Scythian gold ornaments (fig. 2) said to have come from Maikop, in South Russia. They were used as garment decoration and consist of winged griffins of Iranian origin, stags, and rosettes. The relief of the animals shows parts of the surface slanting and sharply contrasted in light and shade. This decorative effect was obtained by bevel- or slant-carving, a technique which most probably originated in bone or wood and is peculiar to Scytho-Siberian art. Another characteristic feature of this art is the frequent use of

parts of animals or birds as separate motives, as seen on the antlers of the stag (fig. 2).

The art of stone inlay was adopted by most of the Iranian tribes, among them the Sarmatians, whose art is familiar to us from finds in western Siberia and South Russia. To the Sarmatians belongs the credit of transmitting cloisonné inlay to Europe through the Goths and other Teutonic tribes. A fine example is a gold clasp (fig. 3), of about the first century A.D., composed of two identical groups of a lion attacking an ibex. It was originally inlaid with stones, probably turquoise, which was favored by the Iranians.

Another Iranian tribe famous for their gold jewelry were the Parthians, who were ruled by the kings of the Arsacid dynasty (248 B.C.—A.D. 226). Parthian jewelry, found in excavations at Seleucia in Mesopotamia and Dura in Syria, is represented in our Museum by a number of fine pieces, such as the gold clasp of the first or second century A.D. illustrated in figure 4. It shows a medallion with an eagle holding a deer in its claws, symbolizing the "sky eagle" of the sun-god Mithra carrying up to heaven Homa, the personification of water and vegetation. The animal group is cast in high relief and enriched in Iranian fashion with turquoise inlay.

Other Parthian jewelry in the Museum consists of a round fibula (fig. 5) and earrings (fig. 6) which show a combination of several techniques practiced already in the ancient Near East. The fibula, with an interesting architectural decoration in openwork, shows filigree, granular work, blue cloisonné paste, and glass pearls. The granular technique, going back to the Sumerian era, was an elaborate process in which small gold seeds, placed either in rows or clusters, were fused to the background.

The techniques and methods of decoration developed and perfected in the beginning of the Christian era continued in the Sasanian era both in Iran proper and in the provinces of Mesopotamia and Syria. Openwork was greatly favored, as seen in several necklaces in the Morgan collection (see fig. 7), some found in Cyprus but doubtless of Syrian manufacture.

In the jewelry of the Islamic period, which began in 622, filigree came into greater prominence, gradually replacing granular work. We find this filigree jewelry in Egypt, Syria, and Iran, where it was often effectively combined with stone inlay and enamel inlay. In the filigree technique, gold wires, straight or braided, are arranged in geometrical designs, as seen in a pair of Fatimid earrings and a pendant with cloisonné enamel (fig. 8), which come from Egypt and may be dated in the middle of the eleventh century.

Several fine examples of Persian jewelry of the Saljuk period are in the Museum's collection. An earring in the shape of a bird is entirely of filigree. The bird motive was greatly favored in the decoration of jewelry as seen on the earring (fig. 9) with a stamped and engraved openwork design. Another remarkable example of Saljuk work is a pendant in the shape of a lion (fig. 10), which was made in four parts. The hair of the lion and details of the face are in filigree of braided wire soldered to the background and forming an all-over design of small circles.

A fine specimen of later Persian jewelry is a signet ring of about 1400, decorated with Chinese dragon heads in openwork, arabesques, and plant motives, which were introduced into Iran in the fourteenth century by the Mongols and continued in the fifteenth century.

The Museum's collection of Indian jewelry is very comprehensive and includes various types and techniques. This jewelry, worn by men and women of all classes, often for ceremonial purposes as seen in Mughal miniature paintings, is the most sumptuous known. There are some pieces made of gold or silver alone; others are richly set with diamonds, rubies, and emeralds or decorated with enamel. Although none of the existing Indian jewelry is much older than the eighteenth century, it represents many designs and methods of decoration going back to earlier periods. Some types of jewelry were worn throughout India, others are typical of certain localities. Floral decoration plays an important part in the jewelry of India. Some of the fine necklaces (see figs. 12, 19) show clearly the influence of garlands of flowers and buds.

A favorite type of jewelry of northern India is represented in the Museum by several magnificent necklaces (figs. 13-15) set with precious stones and pearls. Much of this jewelry was made in Jaipur, which was particularly famous for its enamelwork. The backs of the necklaces (see fig. 16), bracelets (see fig. 17), and the head ornaments (see fig. 19) show an enamel decoration of flowers in brilliant green, red, and blue on a white ground. In some of the necklaces (see fig. 14) the brilliancy of the stones is enhanced by deep blue enamel.

Ancient oriental tradition is apparent in many bracelets and armlets (fig. 17) ending in dragons' heads. Some of them are of plain hollow gold; others are in openwork, forming various geometrical patterns.

A fine example of Indian jewelry is the pendant in figure 18 with the figure of Vishnu carved out of a deep blue stone, probably sapphire, surrounded by guardian serpents, or Nagas.

Much Indian jewelry in the Museum is made of silver, which was worn by the common people (see fig. 20). It consists of necklaces, torques, bracelets, and anklets made in various districts, especially in Bombay. Some of the anklets are of heavy solid silver; others are flexible, showing clusters of bells hanging from plaques in the shape of elephants, such as the one in figure 20. The belt of plaited wire with plaques showing animals and birds in relief (see fig. 20) is typical work of Madras.

Other late Near Eastern jewelry in the Museum comprises a great variety worn by the Arabs and by the Turks (including those in the Balkan countries). It is of silver or silver-gilt and set with semiprecious substances rather than with precious stones. Two examples of heavy belt clasps (figs. 21, 22) show the combination of various techniques. In the piece on figure 21 filigree forms the main decoration. On the clasp in figure 22 we see the survival of granular work with settings of coral and turquoise. In other Turkish pieces large corals are used extensively in combination with enamel.

M. S. DIMAND AND H. E. McALLISTER.



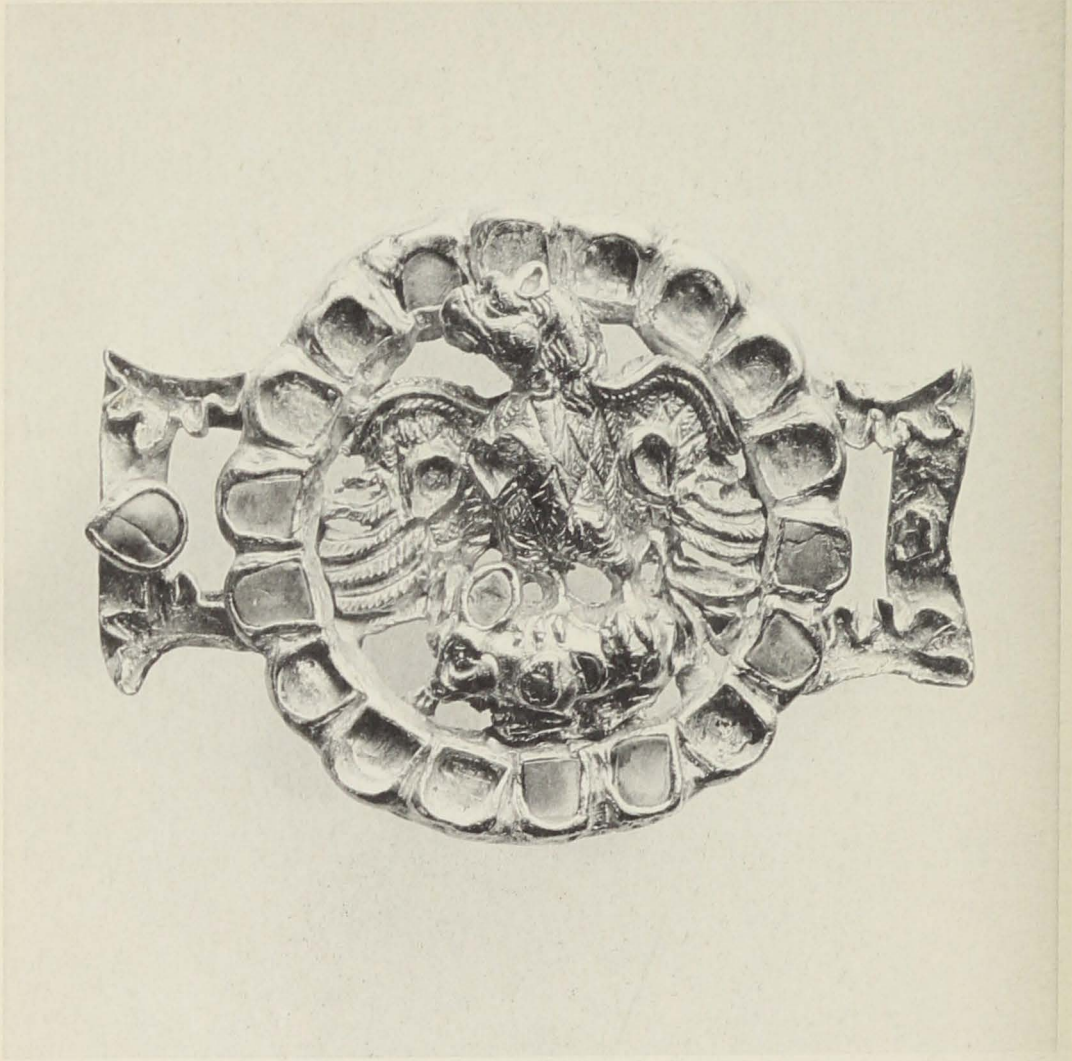
1. Gold and lapis lazuli jewelry of court ladies, from Ur in Mesopotamia. Sumerian, 3500-2800 B.C.



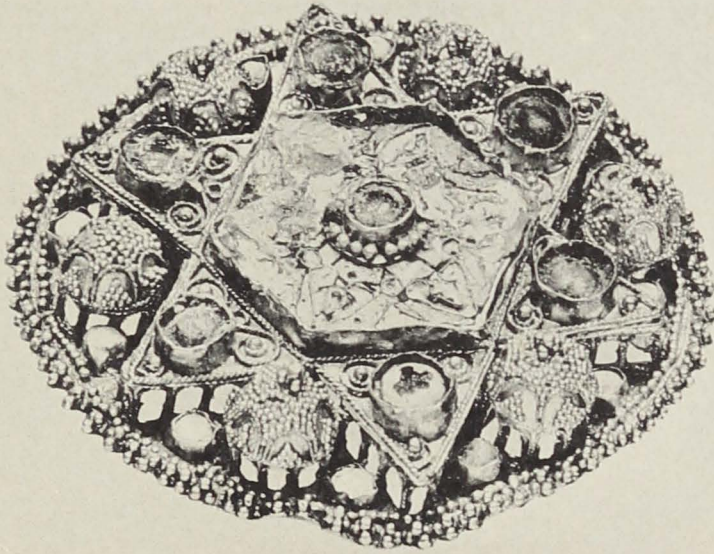
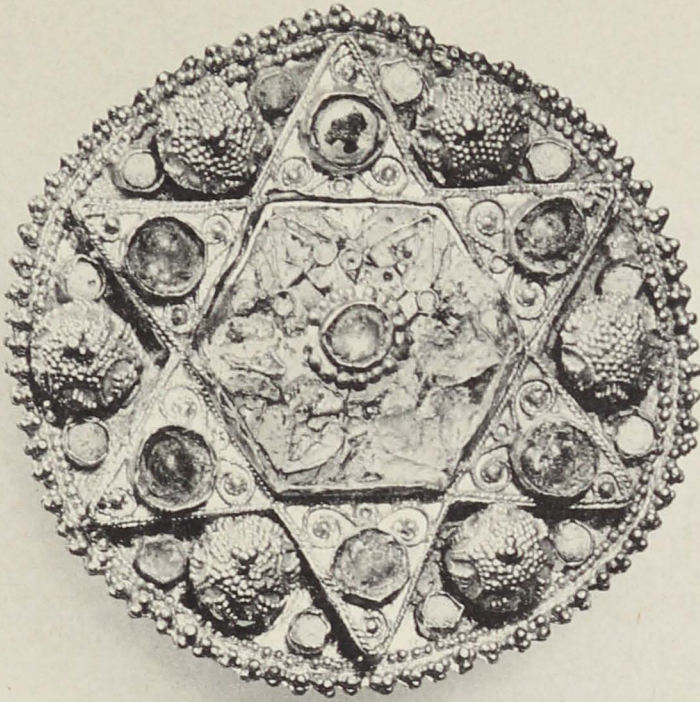
2. Gold ornaments for garments. Scythian, V century B.C.



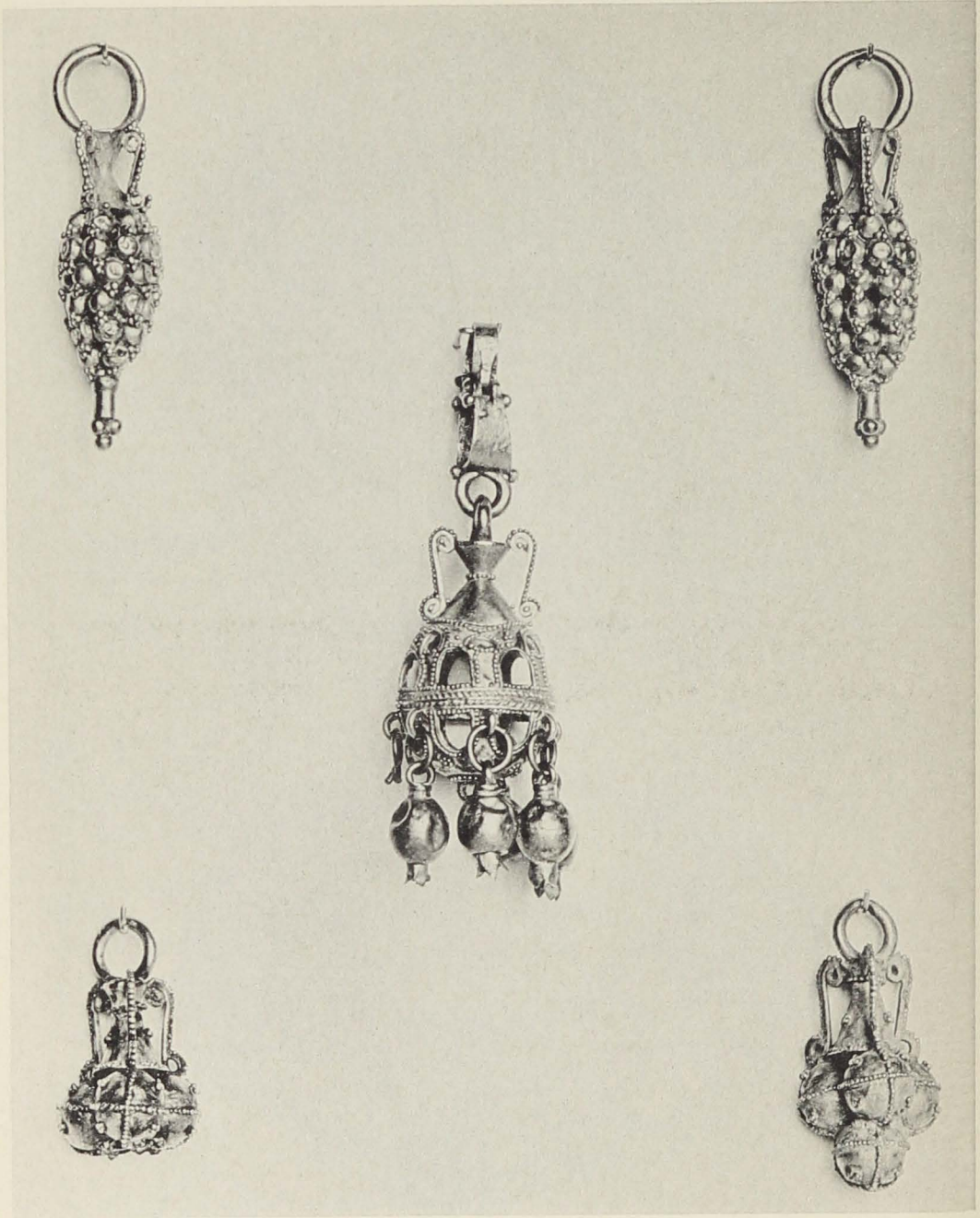
3. Gold clasp with stone inlay. Sarmatian, I-II century A.D. Morgan collection.



4. Gold clasp with turquoise inlay. Iranian, Parthian period, I-II century A.D. Morgan collection.



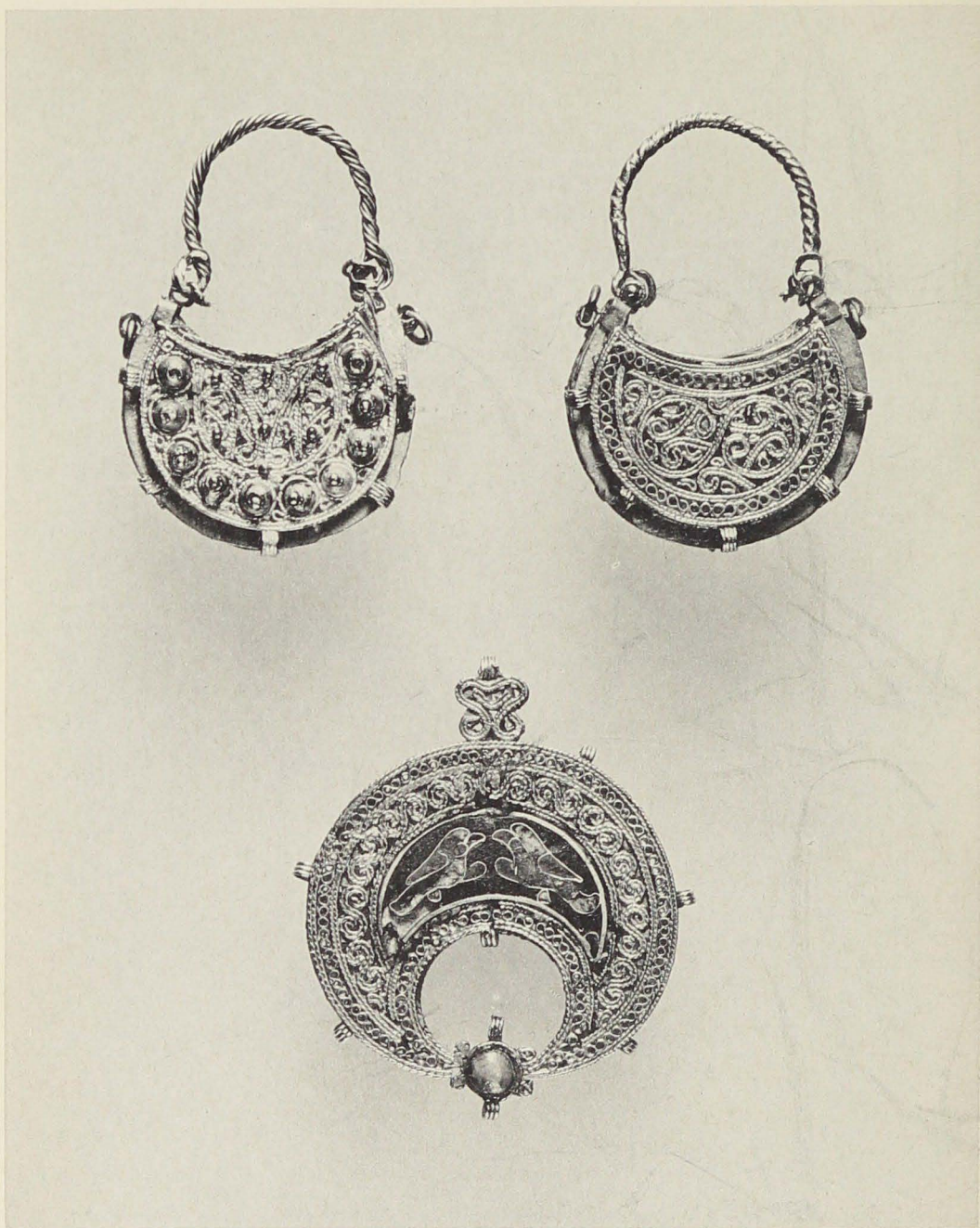
5. Gold fibula with cloisonné inlay. Iranian, Parthian period, I-II century A.D. Morgan collection.



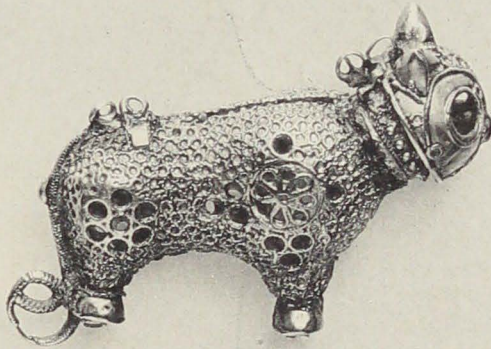
6. Gold earrings. Iranian, Parthian period, I-II century A.D.



7. Gold necklace. Syrian, VI-VII century A.D. Morgan collection.



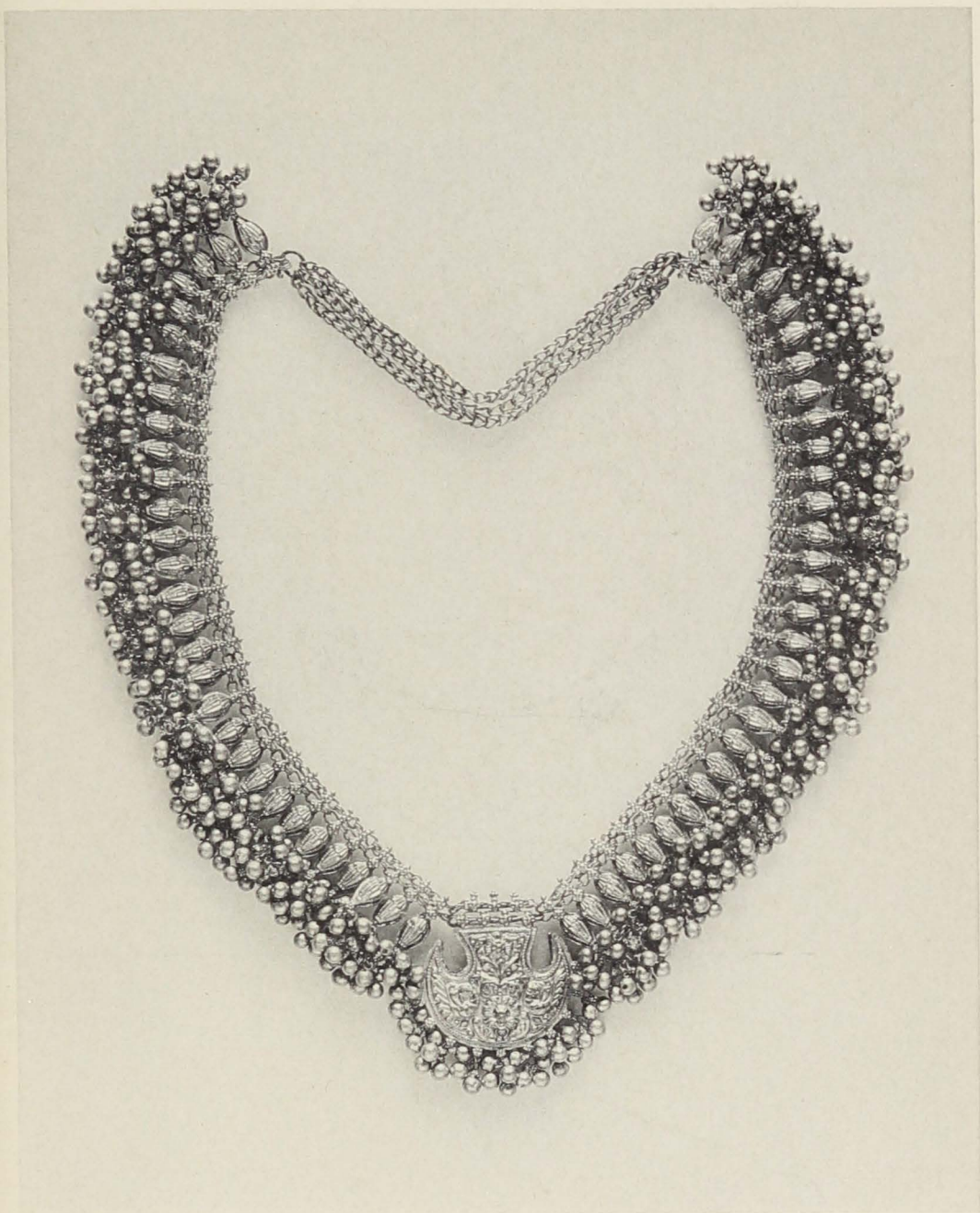
8. Gold earrings and pendant with cloisonné enamel. Egypto-Arabic, Fatimid period, middle of the XI century.



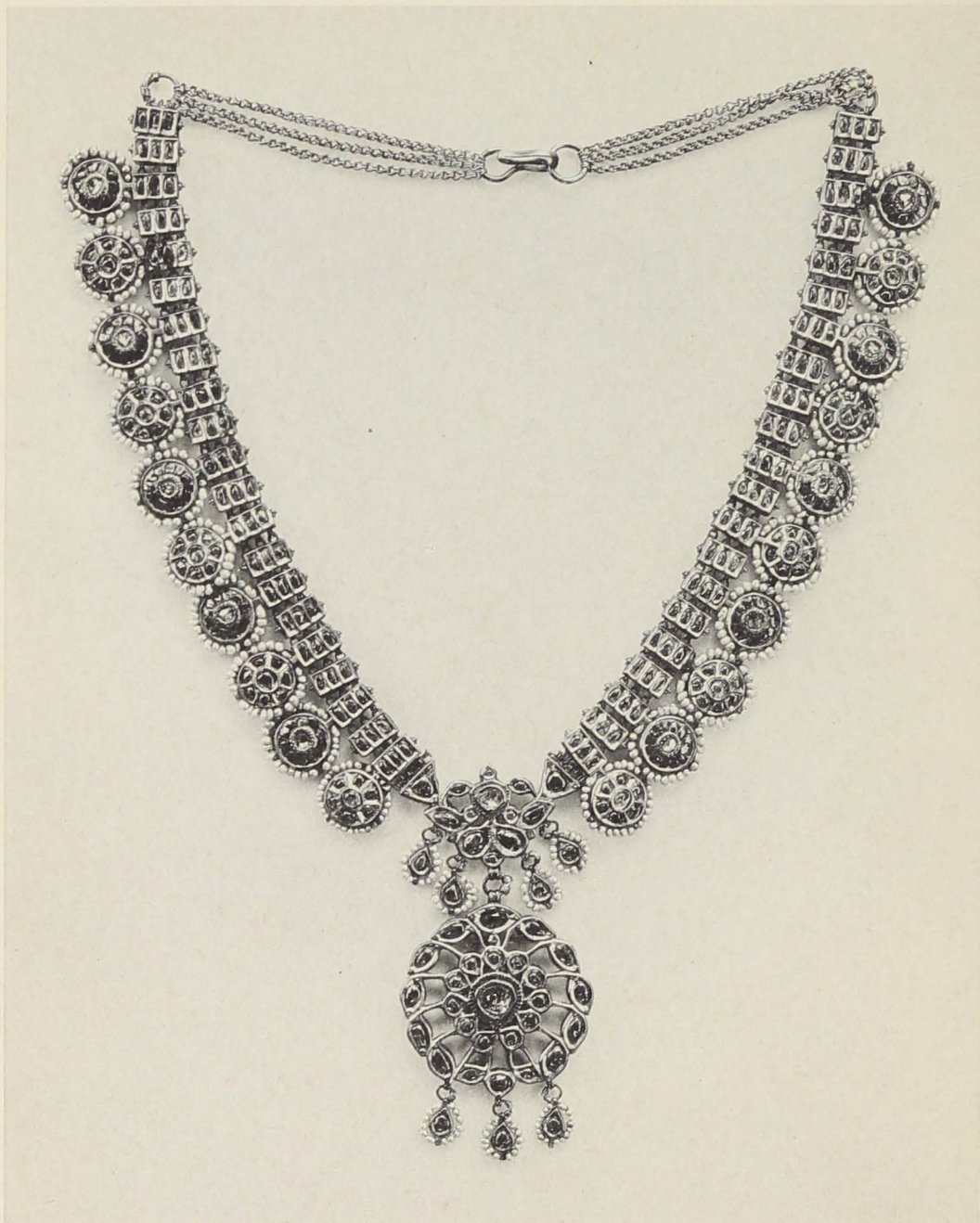
9. Gold earring. Persian, Saljuk period, XI century.
10. Gold pendant. Persian, Saljuk period, XII century.



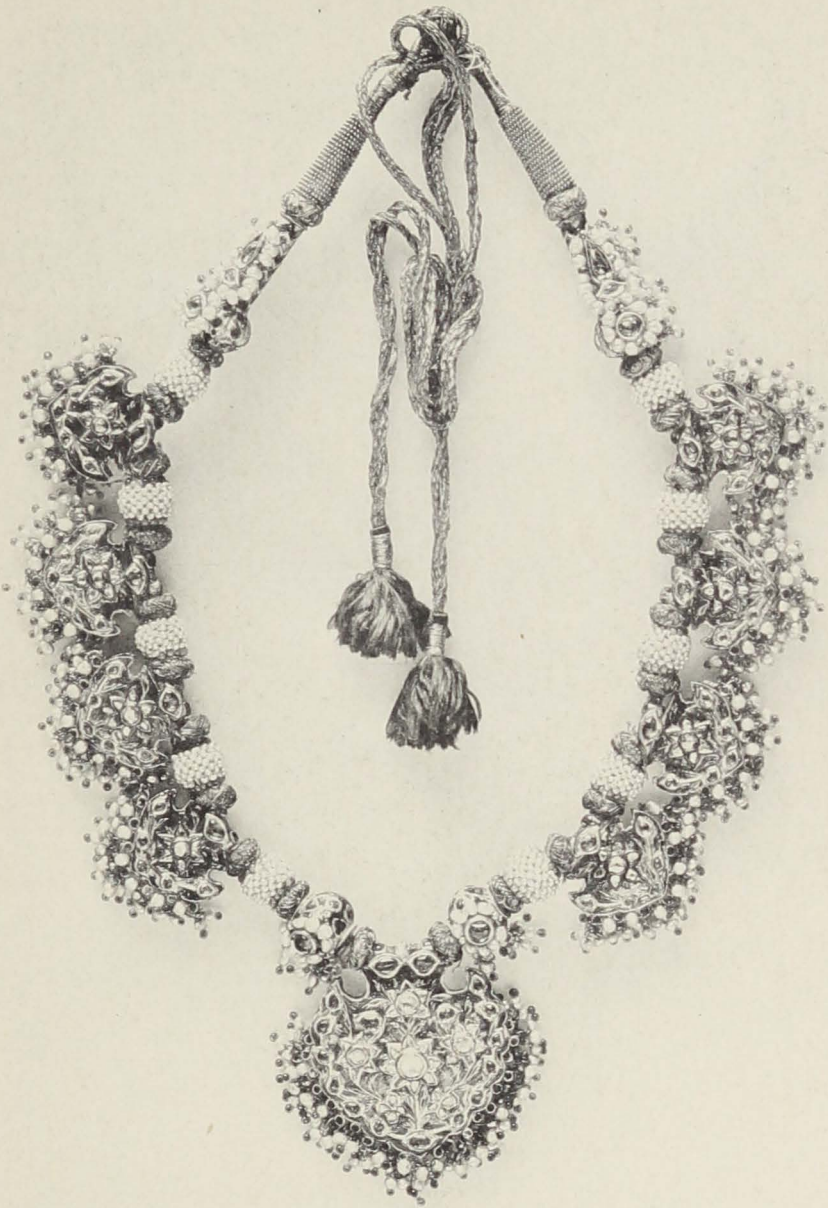
11. Gold signet ring. Persian, about 1400.



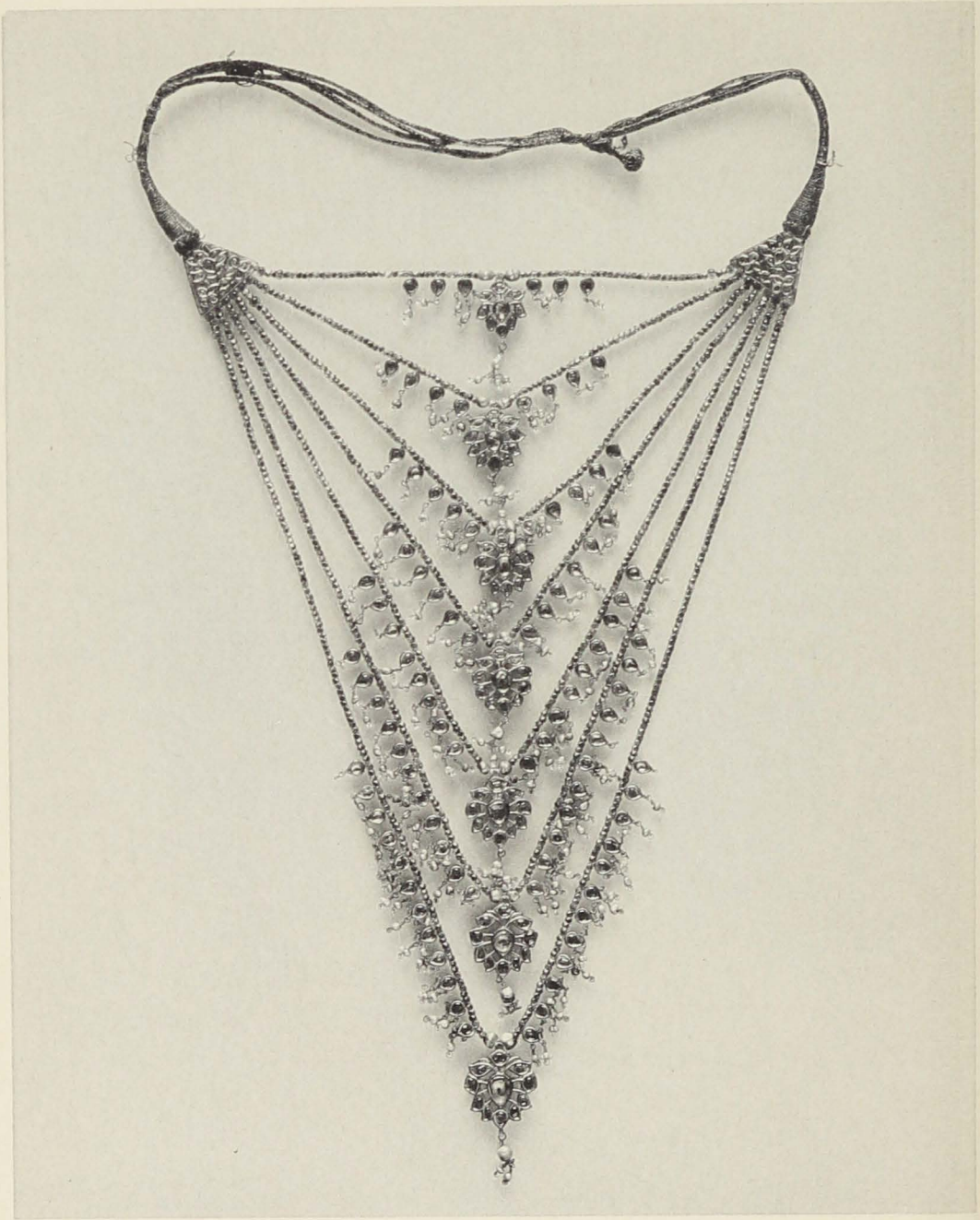
12. Gold necklace. Indian, XVIII century.



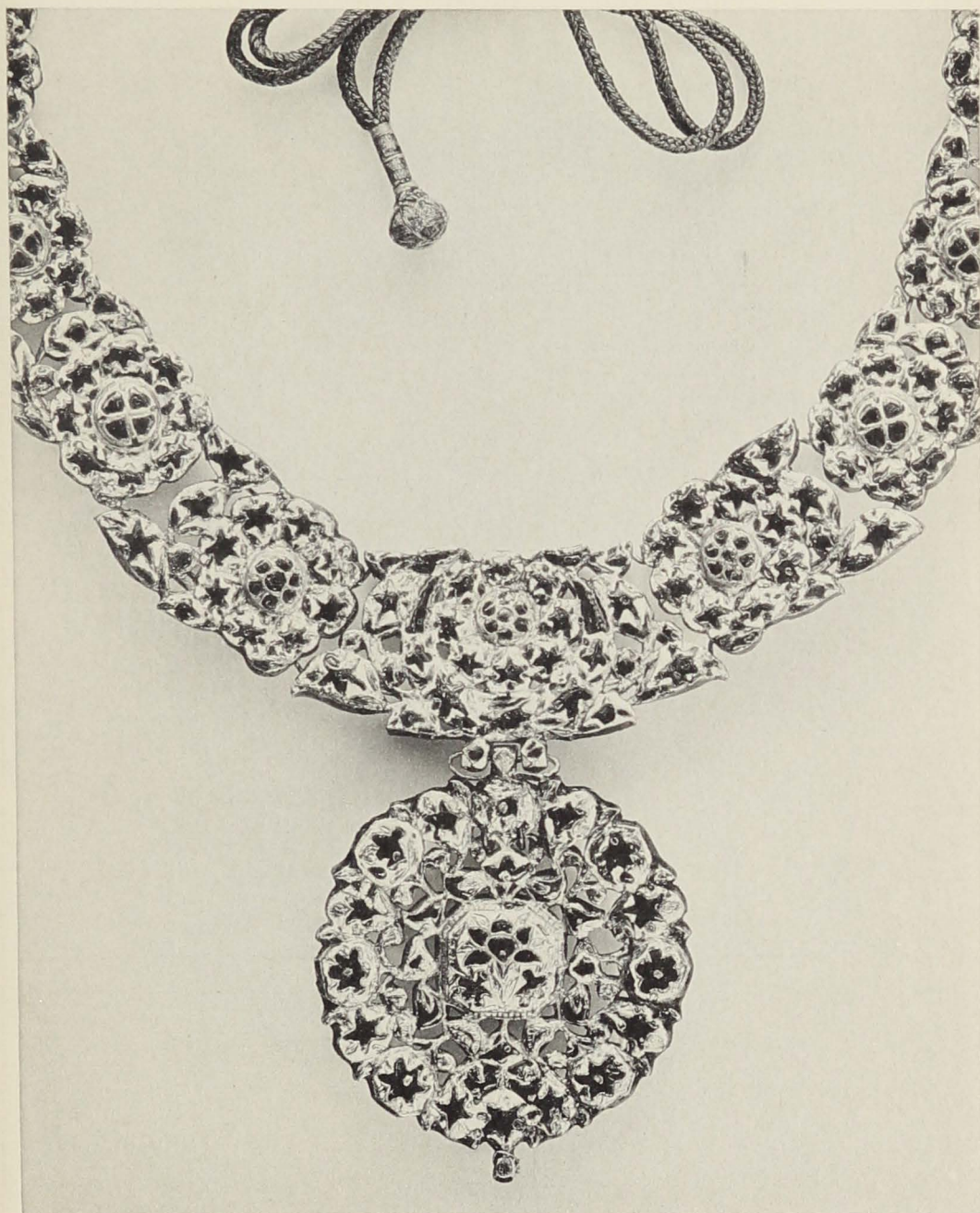
13. Gold necklace set with precious stones and pearls. Indian, Rajputana or Punjab, XVIII century.



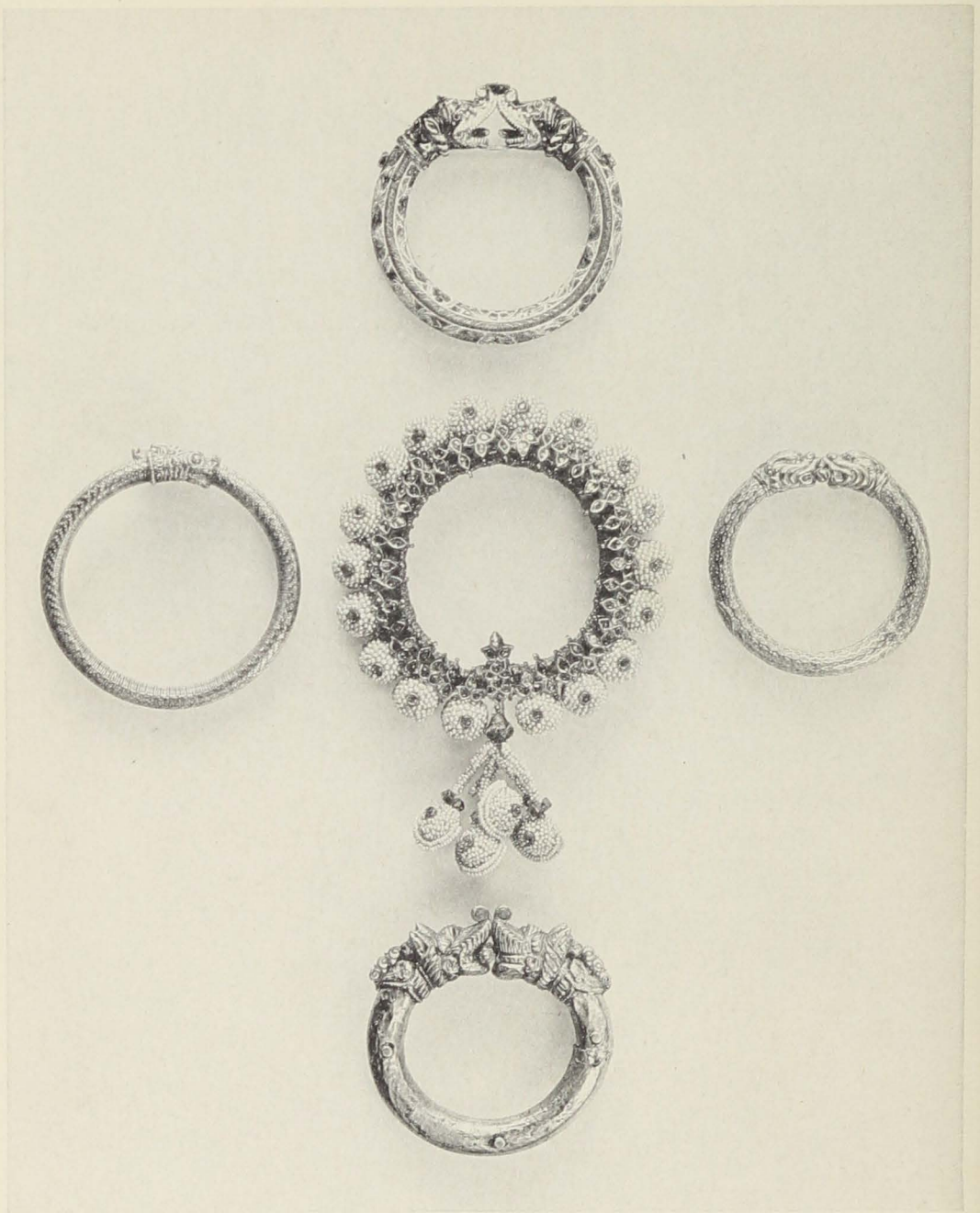
14. Gold necklace with precious stones and enamel decoration. Indian, probably Jaipur, XVIII century.



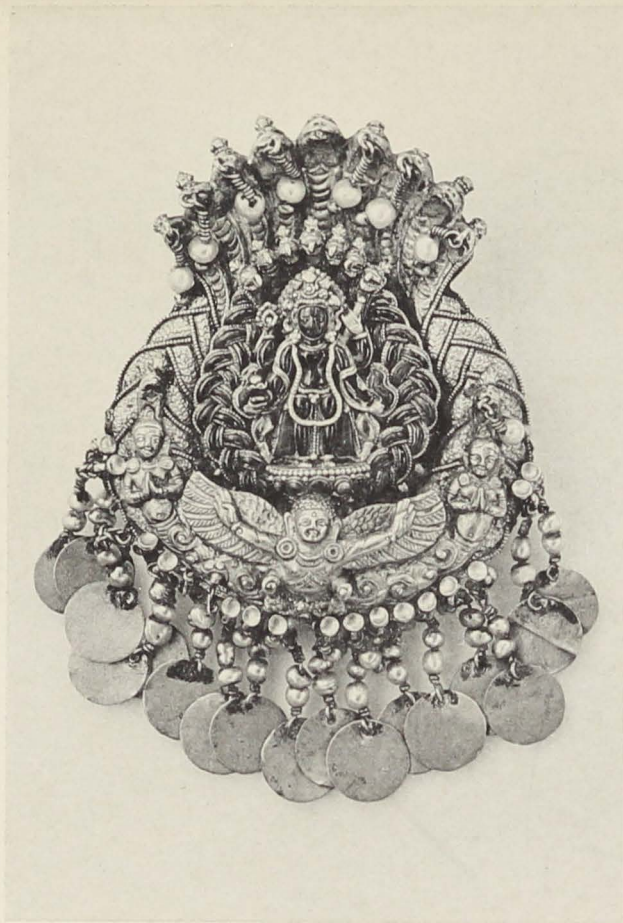
15. Gold necklace with stone and enamel decoration. Indian, Punjab, XVIII century.



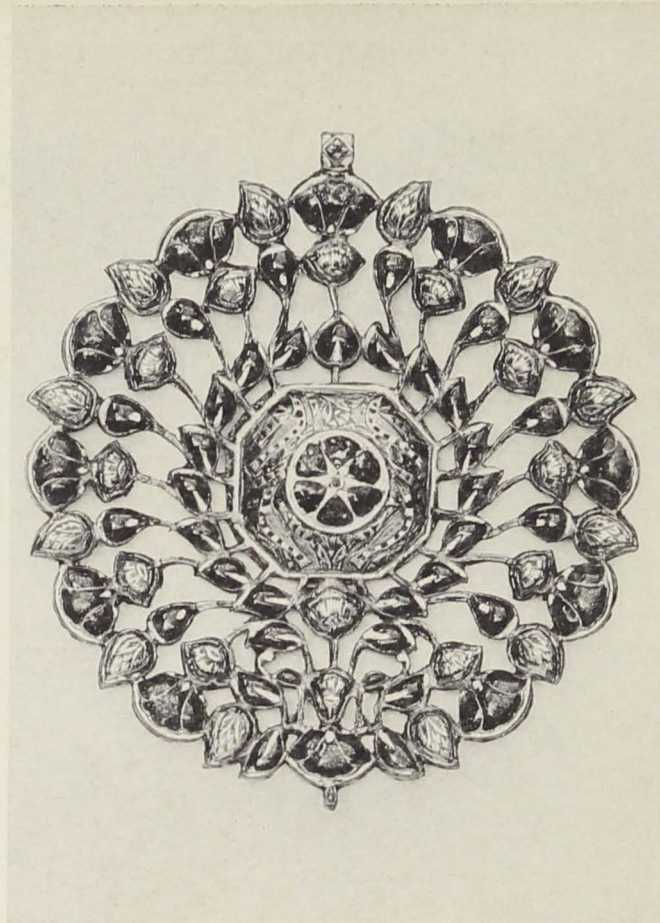
16. Back of gold necklace with enamel decoration. Indian, Jaipur, XVIII century.



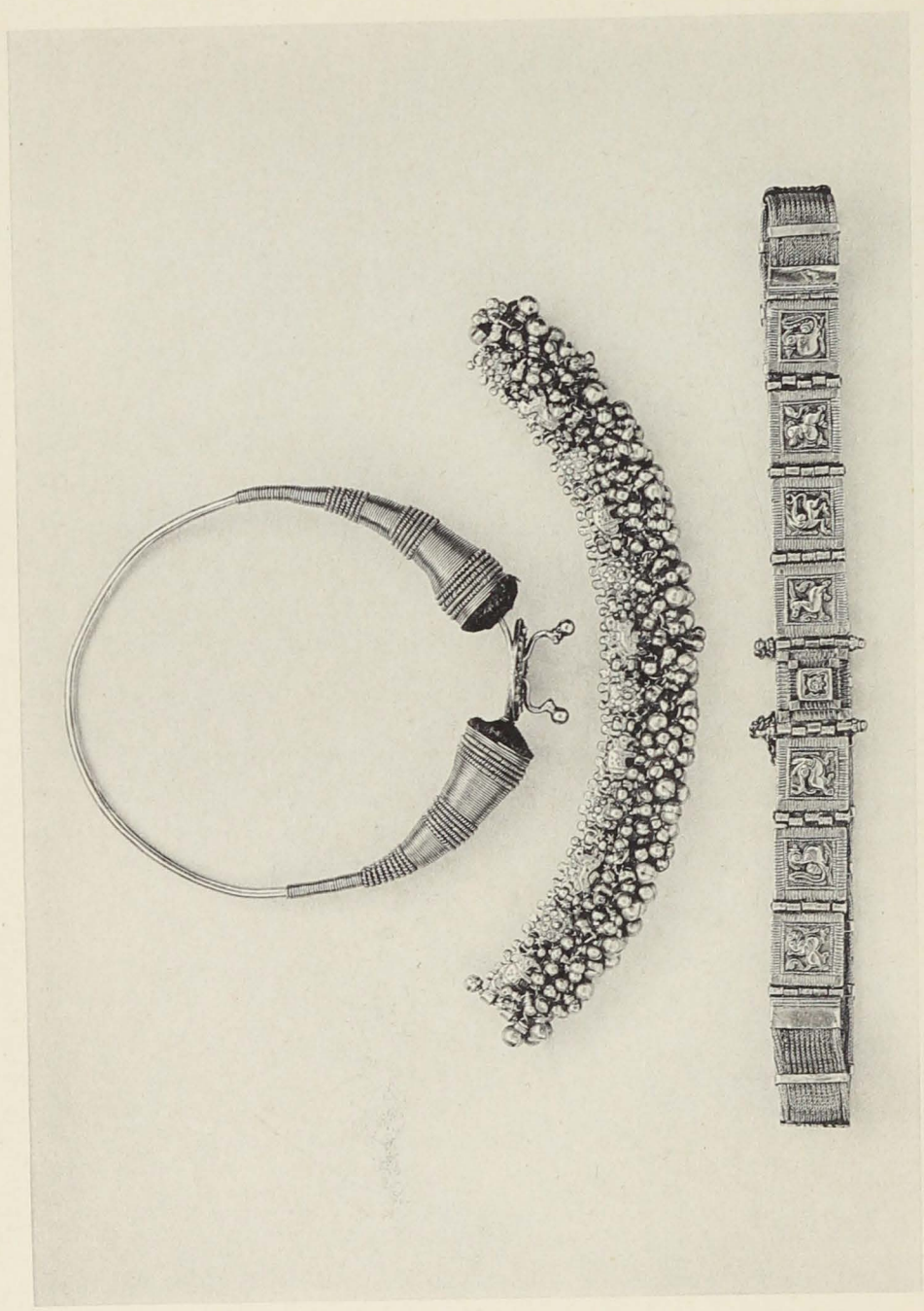
17. Gold bracelets and anklet with precious stones, pearls, and enamel decoration. Indian, XVIII century.



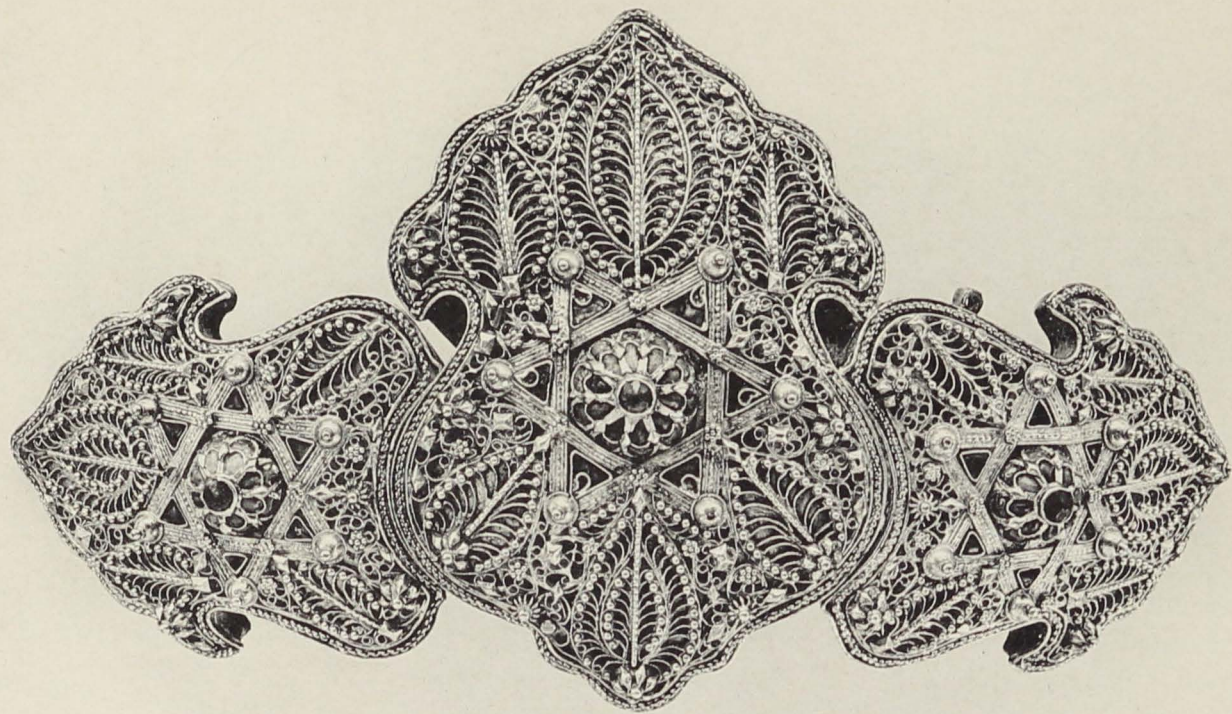
18. Gold pendant with figure of Vishnu.
Indian, XVIII century.



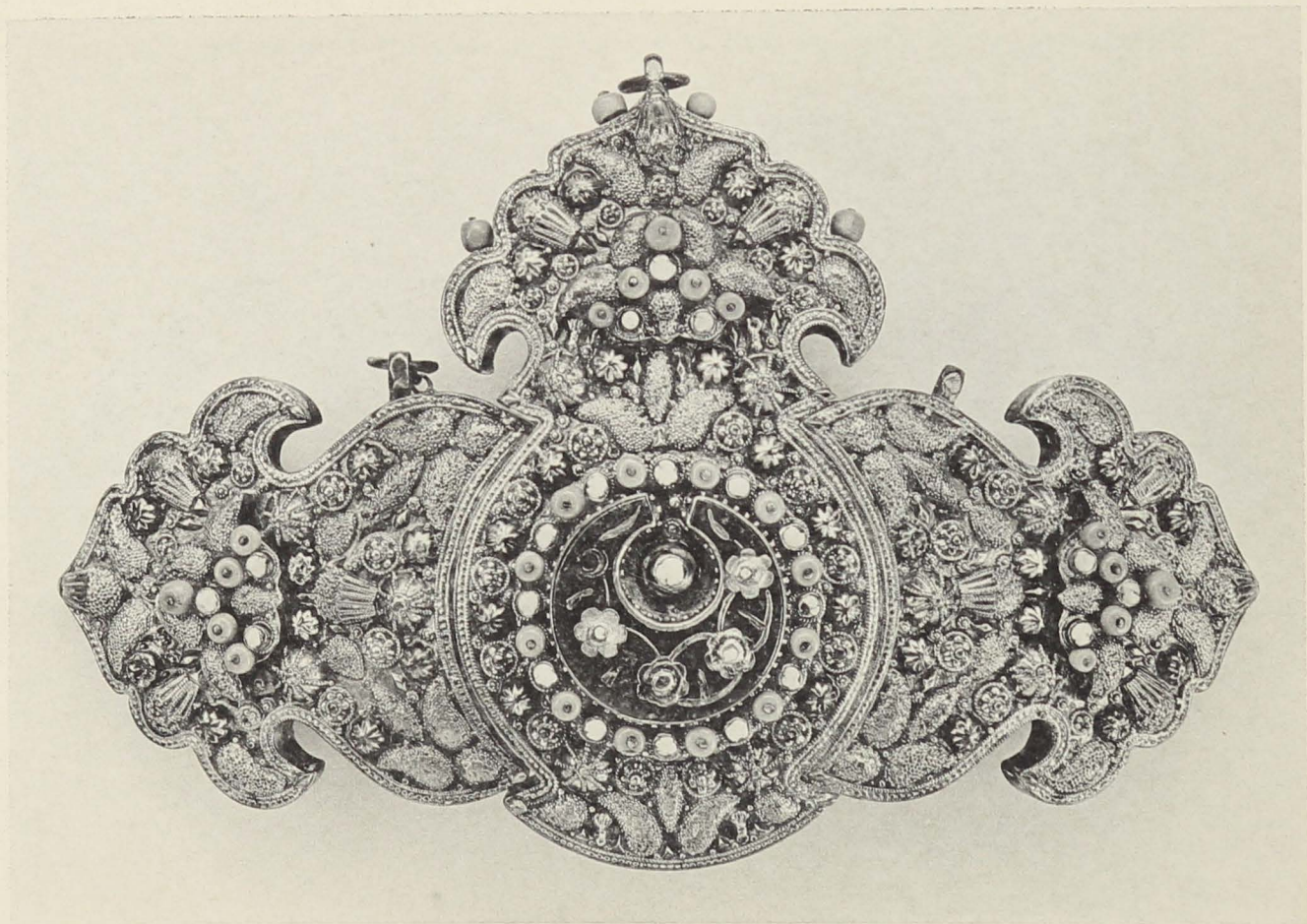
19. Back of a head ornament with enamel
decoration. Indian, Rajputana, XVIII
century.



20. Silver jewelry. Indian, Bombay and Madras, XVIII-XIX century.



21. Silver-gilt girdle clasp with enamel decoration. Turkish, XVIII century.



22. Silver-gilt girdle clasp with stone inlay. Turkish, XVIII century.

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