

Wax Ring Carving—Second Attempt

Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2020 at 12:51 PM

Cassius: Ever since IMGUR abandoned their mobile site and corralled me into their really quite awful app, I've been struggling with images. Feel free to fix them if you can.

Our recent meeting of the Twentieth inspired me to finally make another attempt at ring carving. I tried this once before last fall, but I was living in a truck and the only tool I had was a pocket knife. I was rather frustrated.

Then life intervened; I moved to another state and started a new career, and haven't thought much about it since.

So let's try again! I've ordered the correct tools, and started the project last night.

<https://i.imgur.com/PJoA3f9.jpg>

The first thing I did was clamp the wax in a vise, using soft balsa wood to protect the wax from the metal. I then cut off a section with a jeweler's hacksaw. What a difference that made! This thing almost can't help but cut straight.

<https://i.imgur.com/8ZLF7ux.jpg>

I then applied a six-bladed steel ring-making mandrel to open up the hole. If possible, this tool is even more useful than the saw. Perfect symmetry.

<https://i.imgur.com/OVIAYke.jpg>

The first question was which digit I would size it to. I ended up on the ring finger basically by default; my mandrel doesn't cut any larger than that, which is my only complaint.

<https://i.imgur.com/Xbwycay.jpg>

I pretty quickly realized that I hadn't cut the wax wide enough, so I sawed off a larger section. I'll set aside the small one for another project.

<https://i.imgur.com/aCqVH2H.jpg>

After working this blank with the mandrel, I opened the little set of carving tools and set to work. It quickly became apparent that scraping was the right approach. Cutting, poking, stabbing—they all just created problems.

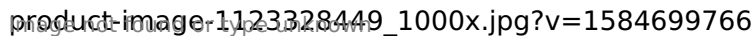
<https://i.imgur.com/UQxAmNy.jpg>

It's easy to get carried away with scraping. I had to become very disciplined in order to maintain symmetry. On the other hand, I don't want to become paralyzed by perfectionism. If this blank doesn't work out, I'll cut another one!

That's as far as I got last night. I'll continue to post updates. If I get something worth casting, that's where things will get really interesting.

Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2020 at 12:58 PM

For reference, this is sort of what I'm going for (except with Epicurus' profile instead of a tree). All of the surviving rings from antiquity are carved stones set into metal rings. I'm making more of a signet ring than a proper cameo or intaglio ring.

product-image-1123328449_1000x.jpg?v=1584699766

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2020 at 1:57 PM

Oh That's great Joshua! I really like the intended end-point. I will see what I can do with the imgur links but I see that pasting the picture in the last message worked. Were you running up on file size limitations in posting the others?

Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2020 at 2:23 PM

The last photo was a direct link to an outside site, which works well. I used to be able to do that from IMGUR *if I accessed the photo in my phone's browser*. Imgur no longer has a browser-accessible site on mobile. I'll shop around for another image hosting site.

I don't think it's a file-size problem since this forum isn't actually hosting the image, bit I could be wrong about that.

Post by “Don” of May 28, 2020 at 3:11 PM

This is great, [Joshua](#) ! Thanks for posting the step by step. I'll look forward to seeing your progress. If your design is like the tree ring, could you technically use the ring to impress into wax seals eventually? Ευπραττειν! May you do well!

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2020 at 4:35 PM

And also, once you prepare a full-size final version, you would be potentially be able to 3d scan so that replicas could be made?


Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2020 at 5:48 PM

Thank you both for the encouragement! I'm still not sure what the endgame is here—whether I'll get the equipment and cast it myself, or take it to a custom jeweler. But I will absolutely produce scans of the wax before I do, as well as of the final product.


Post by “Joshua” of May 28, 2020 at 10:23 PM

Back to the workbench.

Yesterday I got as far as sizing the ring and roughing out the shoulders. This is where I picked up this afternoon;


 type unknown

Since the underside needs to be considerably narrower than the top for comfort and weight, I focused my attention there next. I picked up my carving tool and got back to work. Every time I start roughing out a new section, I get nervous about how janky everything looks;


 type unknown

But with patience I have so far been able to smooth things back in the direction of symmetry. On my way home from work today I stopped at Ace Hardware and picked up a few new files and

some fresh sandpaper. The sandpaper is working small wonders!

 or type unknown

Which become even more apparent when compared with the unsmoothed side shown here on the right;

 or type unknown

After sanding both sides, I have a workable surface about the size of a penny.

 or type unknown

And that's all for tonight! I doubt I'll get much done over the weekend, so look for an update early next week.


 or type unknown

Post by “Cassius” of May 28, 2020 at 10:27 PM

Fascinating! Thanks Joshua!


Post by “Joshua” of June 1, 2020 at 11:56 PM

Busy weekend, but back at it again this afternoon. There's still quite a lot of wax to be removed, but I decided that I'd like to have a clearer idea of the central figure before I went too much further. So I spent most of the evening sketching out profiles. I did up 20 or so, all using a penny as the template.

 or type unknown

The limitations of working on this scale have quickly become apparent! I found myself getting slightly annoyed at how difficult it was to do a recognizable profile in the space allowed.

Here's a sample of what I drew;

 or type unknown

 or type unknown

YZ5q6Eg.jpg or type unknown

zYh18v.jpg or type unknown

What I gradually realized was that the design choices were hugely informed by the tension between the circular template I was working in and the demands of Epicurus' full beard and 'long' face.

I think this last is the one I like best so far;

G0CiHpF.jpg or type unknown

The next decision; do I carve the image above in a two-dimensional relief (like the tree ring), which might be easier and more appropriate for a signet ring, or do I carve a fully three-dimensional profile portrait like we see in all Epicurean rings from antiquity? I suspect that it will be my skill and patience that decide the question.

Post by “Godfrey” of June 2, 2020 at 1:20 AM

One thing you might try is to do your drawing at a larger, more comfortable scale. Then if you scan it, you can scale it down to actual size digitally using Photoshop, Illustrator, gimp, Autodesk Sketchbook or probably even Paint... any software that you're used to, and print it at the correct size. Or you can do it old school and use a photocopier that has a reducing function.

Looks great!

Post by “Cassius” of June 2, 2020 at 1:42 AM

Also, I am sure you have already seen the "Lucretius" ring but I wonder if some kind of lettering in the otherwise blank areas would help make clear the identity. This is the drawing that Munro used, which is apparently a version made from the original in the second photo:



[Withoutbox\(1\).jpg](#)

But you're a far better artist than I ever will be so you of course do what you think works best to your eye. You've made a great start already.

Post by “Joshua” of June 2, 2020 at 9:53 PM

I have a long way to go on the portrait, but I'm at least confident that it will work on this scale. So tonight's project was to finish shaping the ring!

I needed to get the band substantially thinner, so I started with the wax carving tool. Here's what strikes me most about this project: I simply cannot believe how intuitive the shaping process has been the whole way through. Consider that I did not at any point sketch out the shape of the ring; I did not draw lines on the wax to tell me where to carve; I did not have another ring on hand to compare with in three dimensions. Every step has been guided by one essential law, symmetry, and only the human eye to judge it by. I've been very pleased with the whole experience, and I can only dream that the portrait carving goes as smoothly!

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

[GZT8Dil.jpg?1](#) or type unknown

After I scraped down far enough to make me nervous, I made the decision to put aside the tool and go slowly with the sandpaper. [u4nv2Xy.jpg?1](#) or type unknown

The sandpaper makes quite a mess as you can see, but the ring is infinitely better for it. After sanding things down smooth and symmetrical, I used the mandrel and the sandpaper to widen the hole a bit more. After several days of sliding the ring on and off I decided to go for the middle finger instead of the ring finger, since this would look best with a proportionally large carving surface.

bMfEn52.jpg?1 or type unknown

I know we're all more excited about the engraving itself when I get to that, but I'm very pleased just to have gotten this far. Thanks for following patiently--I hope to have more tomorrow.

l1Mtv5.jpg and or type unknown

Post by “Don” of June 2, 2020 at 10:22 PM

Thank you again so much for letting us in on the process! I find this fascinating. I took a jewelry making class (way back) in college, so this has been a pleasant trip down memory lane for me. I never did any casting, but other students did. I'm kicking myself for not trying it now. But living vicariously through your experience had been a pleasure!

Post by “Joshua” of June 2, 2020 at 10:38 PM

That must have been an interesting class, Don! It's increasingly looking like I'll have something worth casting here. I think I'll find a professional to help with that part.

Next steps:

1. Fine-finishing the wax: Every scratch will show in the casting, so I want to have it *really* smooth before I send it out. Apparently nylon stockings work well for this ☐♂.
 2. Trace final portrait sketch and copy over to the ring surface.
 3. Carve the figure. I haven't used the dremel tool yet, but it might be perfect for detail carving.
 4. Finishing touches, **3D scan**, and send it out for casting.
-

Post by “Don” of June 2, 2020 at 10:50 PM

I found myself smiling just reading your description of next steps! 😊 Good luck!

Post by “Cassius” of June 18, 2020 at 6:58 AM

Just checking in - any new progress?

Post by “Joshua” of June 18, 2020 at 7:07 AM

Quote

Just checking in - any new progress?

Unfortunately, no. My sister came to town quite unexpectedly—which is nice!—but my free time has more or less evaporated.

I have done some polishing with plain cotton cheesecloth to smooth out the sandpaper scratches; tedious, but it's working.

Post by “Joshua” of July 8, 2020 at 10:21 PM

The detail carving has proven to be quite the reality check! 😊

I do want to keep trying, but the wall-art thread has me thinking that maybe my focus should be on rendering a really solid profile, and then shopping it around to custom ring makers.

Here are a few links to show what's available on that route;

<https://www.ringsource.com/signet-samples/>

https://www.familysealrings.com/index.html?gcl...PcaAsD7EALw_wcB

<https://www.custommade.com/custom-signet-rings/>

Post by “Susan Hill” of October 19, 2020 at 2:09 PM

I find the idea of a signet ring very attractive! Did anyone get so far as getting a quote for such a ring, or find a maker who already does them?

Post by “Susan Hill” of October 19, 2020 at 2:32 PM

Never mind. I see they are very pricey: <https://www.familysealrings.com/1orderCrests.html>

Post by “Cassius” of October 19, 2020 at 6:00 PM

Thanks for updating this thread Susan. Joshua, did you ever make any more progress on your work?