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Europe jewel thief 'linked to UK'



CCTV from a Hatton Garden shop allegedly showing the thief and an accomplice

A thief wanted in Europe for stealing rings worth thousands of euros could have struck in the UK, police believe.

A woman, usually dressed in a headscarf and wearing gold-rimmed glasses, is being sought by police in Europe for a string of thefts over a 10-year-period.

Following a BBC News website story, experts are now also linking her to the theft of a £120,000 ring in London.

CCTV footage from the targeted stores in London, Paris and Frankfurt appears to show the same woman.

In the Paris and Frankfurt thefts, valuable rings were swapped for replicas. At the London store, staff were distracted and later discovered that the ring had vanished.

In all cases the middle-aged woman has an accomplice, a man or a younger woman.

Staff distracted

At Abrahams jewellers in Hatton Garden, London, co-owner Victoria Abrahams said that last October the two women asked to see items from the window display, but distracted her while she was retrieving them.

When the women left, staff became suspicious and it was discovered that the ring had been stolen.

"I couldn't believe it, said Mrs Abrahams. "I am a very security conscious person. They must have been very clever."

Leonard Ormonde, of insurers M&N Insurance Ltd, said it appeared that two women who stole from the jewellers in Hatton Garden were the same ones seen in footage from Frankfurt.

"It would seem they are one and the same person," he said. "The modus operandi is the same, the distraction and the way they handle the staff."

Mr Ormonde said the loss that such thefts meant to jewellers - depending on their insurance cover - could be "catastrophic".

Det Sgt Heather Pilkington, of Holborn CID in London, said they believed the London theft could be connected to those in Paris and



The main suspect (l) has an alleged accomplice (r) (Image: warndienst.com)

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Frankfurt.

"There could be a link because they look very similar," she said. "We are keeping an open mind. We would urge anyone who thinks they know who these people are to contact us."

Martin Winckel, who runs the Internationaler Juwelier-Warndienst - a crime prevention network for the European jewellery businesses - is convinced the thief who carried out the Paris and Frankfurt crimes has now struck in the UK.

"I am 100% sure it is the same person," he said after seeing the CCTV from the Hatton Garden store. "I think they are the same two people who were in Frankfurt."

Mr Winckel has included images of the woman on his list of most-wanted suspects.

French newspaper Le Figaro has dubbed the headscarf-wearing suspect one of Europe's "high magicians" of crime.

German police are linking her to thefts from hotels in Germany and Switzerland over a 10-year period.

Then in September last year, a 210,000 euro (£189,000) ring was stolen from Tiffany jewellers in Frankfurt, Germany.

Shortly before, the woman in a headscarf had entered the store with a younger woman and asked to see the ring.



The suspect in the Paris theft also wore a headscarf (Image: warndienst.com)

After they left, staff discovered that the ring had been switched for a fake.

A woman of similar appearance visited the Cartier store in Paris in November, but this time with a man.

Staff later realised that a 5.5 carat diamond ring worth 635,000 euros (£574,000) had been stolen.

One of the leads being followed up by police is that the woman allegedly belongs to a family of criminals based in Provence, southern France.

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