

Martin Henig

Iron signet-ring; hoop (incomplete) of flat section expending markedly towards the bezel (Henig ringtype III)¹. Diameter c.21mm; width at narrowest point 2mm; width at bezel 11mm.

It is set with an intaglio of opaque blue glass (11mm by 9mm) showing a vine-leaf. The device is known on a number of gems and glass moulded glass imitations, but this is the first instance of the type from Britain.² Quite a number of these glass intaglios appear to have been filled with a gold-coloured paste and were evidently worn decoratively and not employed as seals, but there is no indication that this was so in the present case³.

The vine-leaf was used as an obverse-device on Verica's gold coins.⁴

It now seems clear that quite a number of the later pre-Roman dynastic coins were based on gems and indeed the die-cutters were almost certainly recruited from the ranks of itinerant gem-cutters.⁵ This intaglio with its ring probably date before the middle of the first century AD and while it comes from Cunobelin's realm and cannot be the model of Verica's famous stater it does illustrate the common iconography of numismatic and glyptic art.

1. M.Henig, A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites (BAR British Series 8, second edition 1978), 35 Fig.1
2. On an engraved gem, G.M.A. Richter, Engraved Gems of the Romans (London 1971) 79 no. 394 On glass, G.Sena Chiesa, Gemme del Museo Nazionale di Aquileia (Aquileia 1966) 401 No.1413; P. Zazoff, Antike Gemmen in Deutschen Sammlungen Hannover, Kestne-Museum (Wiesbaden 1975) 248 No.1310
3. Ibid. No.1311; E.Schmidt, AGD I.2. Staatliche Münzsammlung München. Italische Glaspasten (Munich 1970) 221-2 No.2097,2098.
4. D.F.Allen and C.Haselgrove, 'The Gold coinage of Verica,' Britannia X(1979) 1-17 Series D. pls ii-iv
5. M. Henig, 'The Origin of Some Ancient British Coin Types,' Britannia III (1972) 209-23 and idem, 'Verica's Hound,' Oxford Journal of Archaeology VII (1988).