

Digital Chapter 11 : The Small Finds

Part 3 : Finger rings and intaglios

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(file name : Ch11DIintaglios)

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Part III : Finger rings and intaglios

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[This report was drafted twice in the 1980s as new items were recovered. It has been revised by the author in 2006. The ID number for the reference in the small finds table of the database is given in bracket at the end of the first line of the entry. The catalogue numbers of illustrated items are starred thus (1*)]

Catalogue and discussion

1* TF73: P/Q 11 : 281. (1531)

Red Jasper intaglio, ovoid with flat upper surface (shape F1 *cf* Henig, 1978, 35). Chipped on sides but otherwise in good condition.

Victoria stands in profile to the right; she is nude apart from the mantle which swathes the lower part of her body. One leg is flexed, the foot being supported on a low block and she rests a shield partly on her knee and partly against a low column in order to record the news of a victory upon it. This is a variant on the type of the well known Lullingstone cornelian (Toynbee 1964, 373, Pl LXXXV.c; Henig 1978, 222, no. 304) where, however, the victory leans the shields against a trophy.

Nike nailing a shield to a tree is shown on the bezel of a gold ring dated to the fourth century BC (Boardman 1979, 223 Pl. 724) and the conception of Victory inscribing a shield was certainly known in Italy under the Roman Republic (Hölscher 1967, 122-124 Pl. 11 esp. Nos. 5 and 6). It became more popular under the emperors, appearing on coins of Vitellius (RIC Vitellius 14, 269, Pl. XVI and Hölscher 1967, p.124, pl. 11,8) and his successors. The bronze statue of Victory at Brescia (Vollkommer 1997, 242-3, pl. 169 no. 29) is of this type and dates from Flavian times, and a similar Victory is depicted in relief on Trajan's column (Lepper and Frere 1988. 121 pl. 169 no. 31)

The rich use of patterning, especially on the wing, and the deep, bold folds of the mantle reflect a style which began in the Flavian age but continued through the second century. In particular, we may cite an intaglio in Hanover Museum (Zazoff 1975, 276 Pl. 200 no. 1494) dated to this period. Maaskant-Kleibrink (1978, 252) has assigned these patterned jaspers to her 'imperial small grooves style'. In this instance stylistic dating is in full agreement with the stratigraphical context.

2* TV 78: - :92. (1532)

Iron ring of simple form expanding towards the bezel. The lower part of the hoop is missing (for the type Henig 1978, 35 Ring Type III; pl. XLIII, no. 381). Diameter of ring 26mm; width across bezel 12mm. The intaglio is of red jasper, ovoid with a flat surface and measuring 12 mm by 10 mm.

The device is a lyre with four strings; its arms are composed of a pair of dolphins and a sleeping hound is shown on the sound-board. There is a parallel of late Republican or Augustan date on a banded agate, set in a ring which once belonged to Haydn, in the University Library, Cambridge (Henig 1994, 486 fig. 1). Another close parallel, cut in black jasper, is in the Thorvaldsen museum in Copenhagen (Fossing 1919, 223 Pl. XIX, no. 1651) and a third on cornelian is recorded by Reinach (1895, 70 Pl. 73, Gori 1732, 11, 196,5). In all these gems the soundboard is totally replaced by the animal. The hound is sometimes found by itself on gems (Boardman and Scarisbrick 1977, 41 no. 82; Henig 1994, 486 no. 1072a) and is frequent subject in worked amber, a material often employed for themes with a chthonic meaning (Brown and Henig 1977; Bertacchi 1964, cols. 57-59). Indeed, as Jocelyn Toynbee points out (Toynbee 1973, 123) dogs were especially associated with underworld deities. Dolphins, of course, represent the realm of Ocean over which the souls of the dead must cross to the Islands of the Blessed (see Henig 1977, 348 and 352).

It is likely that the lyre itself as well as its components have a symbolic meaning. For example it brings to mind Orpheus who visited the underworld in search of Euridice, and was seen in Greek and Roman times as a saviour. Symbols of salvation such as these would no doubt have been a considerable comfort to the Roman soldier in the course of his daily life; like the analogous other-worldly themes on his parade armour (Toynbee 1964, 298) it would give him a feeling of certainty and security. Orphism (Graf 1996) offered the promise of purification from guilt, and freedom from pain in the after life. In this respect, it seems apposite to record a Greek prototype of the fourth century BC for which an Orphic origin has been claimed. It is a cornelian intaglio showing a small bird perched upon a lyre which has a facing Gorgoneion upon the sound-box (Boardman 1970, 413, No. 309 = Henig 1994, 37 no. 59.) The new jasper, then, is additional evidence that the subjects of signets were chosen not just for their beauty but for their deeper significance as well.

This gem is simpler in its cutting than the last but belongs to the same tradition; the ring is most unlikely to date after about the middle of the second century AD.

3 HS 76: 12: 19. (1533)

Ringstone, Sardonyx (surface orange darkening to a deeper reddish shade; the ground colour is white). Shape is a truncated cone with rounded edges on the upper side (see Henig 1978, 35, fig. 1, shape F3), Lower surface 13 x 9mm, upper 9 x 6mm, thickness 4mm.

The gem has not been engraved as a signet. For plain sardonyx stones in rings see Marshall 1907, pls. XX and XXI, nos. 802-4, 819. In Britain glass imitations of sardonyx gems are recorded at Woodeaton, Oxfordshire (Ac. No. R107) and from Highgate Woods, London (inf. A. E. Brown and H. Sheldon). Although plain

gems were used throughout the Roman period (see Henig 1979 for a plain jasper set in a ring of Flavian date), they were especially popular in the third and fourth centuries, when colour seems to have been more prized than intaglio-devices engraved by the skill of a lapidary.

4* TF 74:- :120. (1534)

Finger ring, bronze. Badly corroded, lower part of hoop is missing. Diameter 20mm, width 13mm.

Type as Henkel 1913, 110 and pl. XLVII, no. 1207. Also Henig 1978, 37-8, fig. 1 Type V; end of second century/early third century.

The intaglio, dimensions 9mm by 7 mm with a bevelled edge, is made of glass. Its blue upper surface and dark ground is imitative of *nicolo*. The device is a Satyr holding (?) a bunch of grapes in one hand and a curved staff in the other; his cloak of fawn-skin (*nebris*) hangs over his arm. There is an almost exact parallel to this gem, set in a similar ring, from Colchester (Henig 1978, 207, Pl. vi. no. 169).

5 KF74 or TF74 sf 42. (1535)

Bronze ring with raised octagonal bezel and expanded slightly concave shoulders; part of the hoop is missing. Diameter 17mm.

For the form see especially Henig in Down 1979, 149-151, fig. 44 no. 10, from Upmarden which is identical. See also Marshall 1907, 218 no. 1420 from Hod Hill, Dorset; 243 no. 1653 from Wittering, Northants, a silver ring; the gemstone setting is lost but the Upmarden ring contains a glass intaglio of Roman-British manufacture. It is likely that the ring, too, was made in Britain.

6 HS 77: -: 658. (1536)

Iron signet ring, has a diameter of c.23mm and a hoop of flat section expanding markedly towards the bezel. Width at narrowest point 3mm, width across bezel 15mm. The setting for the stone is oval and measures 12 mm by 9 mm.

The type approximates to Type V, dated *c.* A.D. 150-200 (Henig 1978, 37 and fig. 1; see Pl. xliii. no. 391 for an iron example).

7* HS 76: 11: 238. (1538)

Iron finger ring (Henig 1978, 35, fig. 1 form V). It is broken and the break has removed an edge of the intaglio. This is a moulded *nicolo* glass (Shape Henig F2 or F3 15mm in length by 12mm in breadth. It carries the device (impression described) of a Satyr seated upon an altar in profile to the left. Over his left arm he holds an animal skin (*nebris*) and in his left hand a curved throwing stick

(*lagobolon*). He holds something in his right hand, perhaps a small animal or a bunch of grapes. For a satyr similarly seated but to the right and without the attributes see Henig 1978, 300, Pl. XXVIII no. App. 109 (amber glass from Chester).

The date based on form of ring and style and material of intaglio is likely to be around the end of the second century AD.

8 TF 75: -:288. (1537.)

Bronze finger ring. External diameter 17mm. (Internal diameter 14 mm). Stirrup-shaped. Hoop expands in width from 1.5mm at narrowest point, to 6mm at bezel. Bezel 7 x 5 mm, filled with red enamel, in imitation of a gem (red jasper) setting.

The simple form of the ring relates it to a type current in the first and second century AD (Henig, 1978, 55-6, fig. 1 type III), but bronze examples with enamelling appear to belong in the later second or third centuries, (see Butcher 1967, 21-5, fig. 8 nos. 1-4) though Nor' Nour was not a manufacturing site as was first thought (Butcher 1977, 55-4). Enamelling was a north-west European craft, and this ring, like others, was probably made somewhere in Britain or in a nearby continental province.

Fig. D11.79 Intaglios

Scale 4:1

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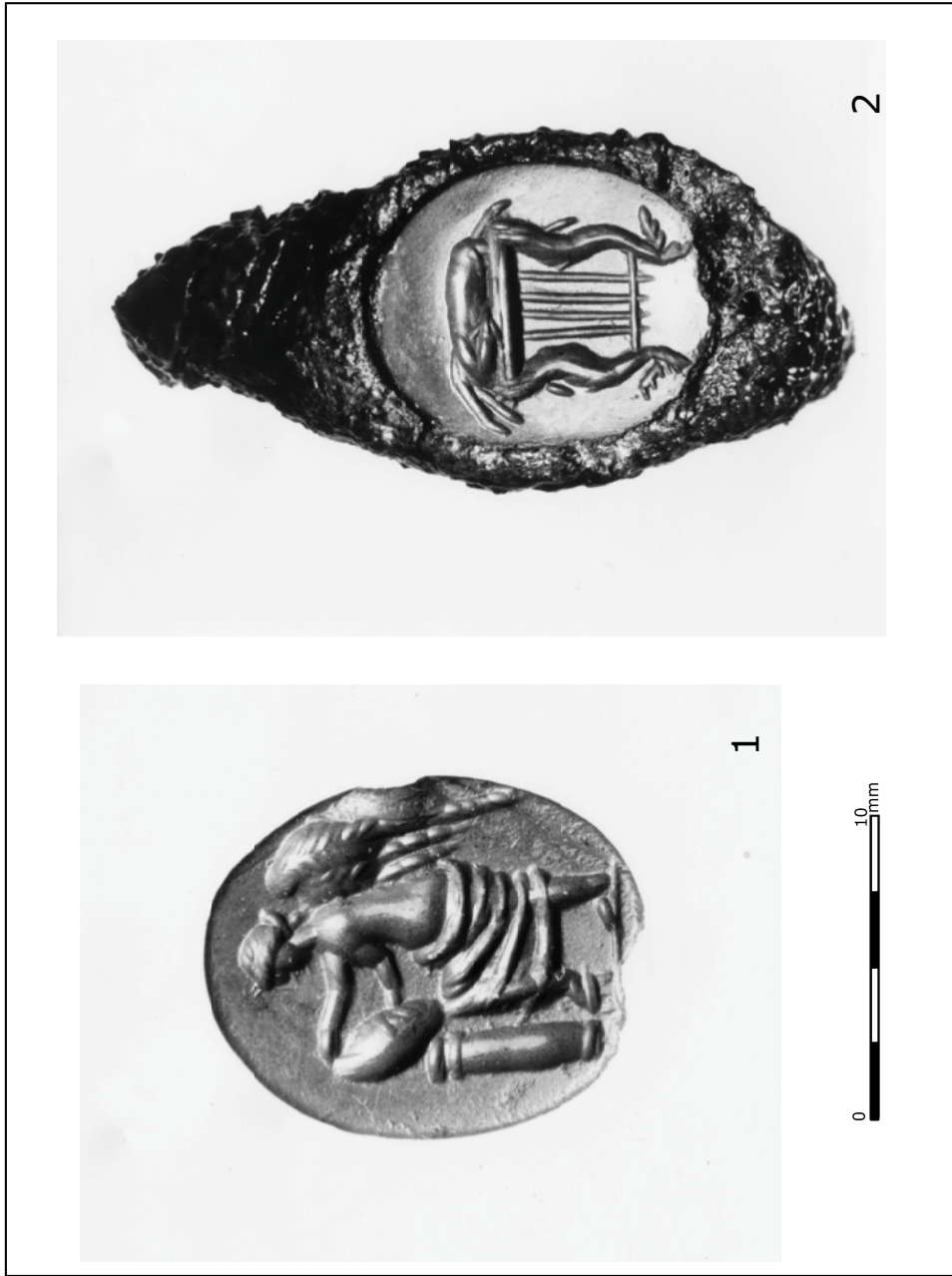


Fig. D11.80. Finger rings with glass intaglios

Scale 1:1

