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POSY RINGS.

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AMONG the various classes of finger-rings, there is not perhaps one which offers so many pleasing varieties as those commonly designated Posy Rings. This term is generally applied to rings which bear a motto or verse, such as is frequently to be found on betrothal rings, and of which I have found no example earlier than the latter part of the sixteenth century. Prior to that period, these verses or mottoes seem to have been otherwise designated, as will subsequently be seen.¹

I am of opinion that the Posy Ring is of Roman origin. Many *intaglii*, with short mottoes in Greek and in Latin, are found, mounted in rings; each class of these may be Roman, for the Romans employed Greek for inscriptions, as French was used in England in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Sometimes the motto is cut on the metal. Thus, a gold ring in my collection has on the bezel—ΑΑΗΘΙ · ΖΗCΑΙC; and another, ΙΤΕΡΕ · FELIX (*sic*, for *utere?*). Some gems referred to by Peiresc² have—BONAM · VITAM :—AMO · TE · AMA · ME; and—VIRTUTEM · AMA. Maffei,³ commenting upon a gem with the inscription—ΑΘΑΝΑCΙ · ΠΙCΤΙC, observes that pro-

¹ The earliest occurrence of the term posy used to designate a motto, such as are inscribed on the rings under consideration, is probably to be found in the curious Treatise of Palsgrave, "Eclaircissement de la Langue Francoyse," published in 1530. He gives "Posy, device or worde, *devise*." Sherwood gives "A posie, *devise*," and Cotgrave renders

devise "a device, poesie, embleme, conceit, &c. Quel devise y avoit il en cela? What reason, or sense, was there in that?"

² *Récherches Curieuses d'Antiquité*, par M. Spon, p. 69; Fran. Ficoroni *Gemmæ Literatæ*, Romæ, 1757, p. 2.

³ *Gemme Antiche*, Roma, 1709, vol. iv. p. 118.

bably it was set in an *annulus pronubus*, or nuptial ring. It should be remarked that some of these mottoes were cut in intaglio, to serve for seals, whilst others were in cameo, and often on a sardonyx, so as to form the background of a different colour from the letters. Rings set with these gems were given by young *amorosi* to their lady-loves; and it is obvious that they may have been not only pledges of honest affection, but of unhallowed love as well. This conjecture is supported by a line of Ennius,—“*Alii dant annulum spectandum a labiis*,”⁴ implying, as some have supposed, that they held their rings in their teeth, and invited young damsels to approach and see or read what was engraved upon them. Hence also Plautus says, “*Spectandum ne cui det annulum neque roget*.”⁵ The Roman posies are for the most part engraved on gems; but the Duke of Northumberland has a curious gold ring of that period, found near Corbridge, which bears the motto,—*AEMILIA ZESES*, pierced in the hoop: it has been described in this Journal.⁶ See also the woodcut at the close of this memoir.

It is a question whether these rings may not have been the *annuli natalitii*, referred to in the Classics, presented by damsels to their lovers.

In the *Epidicus* of Plautus, the *Virgo* asks of *Epidicus*,⁷—

VIR. Quis tu homo es qui meum parentum nomen memoras et meum?

EP. Non me novisti? *VIR.* Quod quidem nunc veniat in mentem mihi.

EP. Non meministi me auream ad te afferre natali die

Lunulam atque anellum aureolum in digitum? *VIR.* Memini mihi homo.

Tune is es?

*Gori*⁸ enumerates many of these gems, bearing either the name of the donor's lady-love, or some good wish:—*XAIPE KAAH*.—*XAIPE ΠΥΧΗ*.—*ΚΥΡΙΑ XAIPE*. (Hail! fair one—Hail! my life—my Mistress, Hail!); also the following in Latin—*VOTIS · MEIS · CLAUDIA · VIVAS*; and a gem, with *MNHMONTETE · KAAHΣ · ΤΥΧΙΣ* (be mindful of good fortune.)

These mottoes are to be found on rings of the early Christian period. One in my collection bears, signet-wise,—*LIBERI* ·

⁴ Apud Isidorum, lib. i. Originum, c. 26.

⁵ Plaut. in *Asinaria*; Kirchm. de *Annulis*, p. 167.

⁶ *Archæological Journal*, vol. vii. p. 192. This interesting ring had been

regarded as of *cinq-cto* workmanship; but there can be scarcely any doubt of its Roman character. It was discovered on the site of the station *Corstopitum*.

⁷ Act v. scene i. v. 33.

⁸ ii. p. 54.

VIVAS ; Father Garrucci, the eminent Jesuit archæologist, possesses one which has the inscription,—JANVARI · VIVAS ; and a gem, figured in Garrucci's edition of the Hagioglypta, bears the inscription,—IOHANNES · VIVAS · IN · ✕ (Christo).⁹ He also mentions another¹ which is exceedingly beautiful. On the bezel, which is circular, is represented a dove with wings half expanded, apparently intended for the soul of one departed, which hears the voice of her heavenly spouse. Around is the motto,—SI · AMAS · VENI ; or, perhaps,—VENI · SI · AMAS, with which may be compared the verse of the Canticle of Canticles,—“Arise, make haste, my love, my dove, beautiful one, and come.”² If I remember right, the bezel of the ring in the possession of Father Garrucci is of silver, and the hoop of brass.³

Peiresc describes a curious wedding-ring of gold, of the sixth century, which bore on the bezel a head rudely engraved, and around,—✕ TECLA · SEGELLA. Around the hoop was the inscription,—✕ TECLA · VIVAT · DEO · CVM · MARITO · SEO (*sic*). He also mentions another gold ring, on the bezel of which were two heads, those of a man and a woman, whilst over them was represented a little dove supporting a crown, and around, VIVATIS.

The wedding-ring of St. Louis of France was set with a sapphire intaglio of the crucifixion, and bore on the hoop, “Dehors cet anel, pourrions avoir amour ?”⁴

In France these mottoes were sometimes called *chansons*. In the inventory of the Duke of Berry we find the item, “A Jehan Lassaieur orfèvre pour un anneau d'or esmaillé de lermes, auquel est escript une *chançon* ;”⁵ whilst in England, prior to the sixteenth century, they appear to have been called reasons, or “resons.” Thus in his will, in 1463, John Baret of Bury St. Edmunds orders that the “Seynt Marie preeste” should sing his mass “of prikked song at Seynt Marie auter” in a white vestment, “with a remembraunce of my armys, and my reson therto,—Grace me gouerne.”⁶ And,

⁹ Hagiogl. p. 235.

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

² Cant. of Cant., c. ii. v. 10.

³ It may be inquired how I distinguish some rings as Roman, and others as early Christian, which bear nearly identical mottoes? I reply, partly by the names, and partly by the form of the letters.

⁴ Dict. de Trevoux, p. 425.

⁵ No. 6727.

⁶ Bury Wills, p. 18, publications of the Camden Society. Among the effects of Henry V., of which an inventory was taken in 1423, occurs a barge covering, embroidered with “*Resons du roy et de la royne*.” Rot. Parl., vol. iv. p. 234. The word is used by Lydgate in a similar sense; Minor Poems, p. 223.

in Rous's lives of the Earls of Warwick, are the following examples of posies or reasons *temp.* Henry VI., as used by the three daughters of Richard Beauchamp, Earl of Warwick.

1st. Margaret married John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury. "Hir reason was,—Til deithe depart"—a sentiment which was borne on the wedding-ring of the wife of Duke John, brother of Eric XIV. of Sweden, though in a different form,—“Nemo nisi mors.”⁷

2nd. Alianour married Edmund Duke of Somerset. "Hir reason was,—Never newe."

3rd. Elizabeth married Lord Latimer. "Hir reason was —'Till my live's ende.'" ⁸

My collection contains several examples of rings with "resons." One, of gold, has—*in · hunc · fug*. Another, also of gold, bears on the inside—*sum · mal · deat*. The outside is delicately chased, and bears traces of enamel. It is divided into four compartments, bearing, alternately, flowers, and a scroll on which may be deciphered the reason, —*mul · sum · pper*. Another, of silver which has been gilt, has—*rest · mon · plexir*,—and between the words there are trefoils, which have been enameled. Another is formed of a broad band of silver, and bears—+ *quant · diru · plera · melior · sero*.

Reicholt mentions the custom of engraving mottoes or inscriptions on marriage rings. He says,—“Sic annulis sponsalitiis etiam subinde litteræ initiales certorum quorundam verborum memorabilium aut rythmorum insculptæ sunt, quo conjuges crebrius reminiscantur mutue suæ fidei atque amoris perpetui.”⁹

But these reasons or mottoes were not confined to betrothal rings; they occur on signets and on other rings. A seal-ring, in my collection, has the device of a cradle, empty, and within the hoop—*my will · were*, possibly expressing desire for progeny—my will were; another, found not far from York, bears on the inside—*St · Barbara · rre*,—having reference probably to the figure of St. Barbara, the patron invoked against sudden death—which is engraved on one of the shoulders. Another is a fine gold ring, belonging to the iconographic class, and which resembles the preceding in workmanship, bearing on the bezel the figure of St. Christopher,

⁷ Doran. *Monarchs Retired from Business*, vol. ii. p. 245.

⁸ Ed. Hearne, *Hist. Ric. II.*, p. 235.

⁹ iii. p. 582.

and within the hoop is found the same motto,—*dr · hun · rrr.* which has allusion to that saint, who was the patron against sickness, tempest, earthquake, and the dangers of fire and flood. To his figure there is frequently attached the following distych :—

Christophori Sancti speciem quicumque tuetur
Illa nempe die nullo languore gravetur.

The term *Posy* is used to denote mottoes or inscriptions, sometimes they are in prose but generally in verse. Puttenham, in his *Art of English poetry*, 1581, says :—

“There be alsoe another like Epigrams that were usually sent for Yeare’s Gifts, or to be painted or put upon banketting dishes, or sugar plate, or of Marche paines, &c.

“They were called *Nenia* or *Apophoreta*, and never contained above one verse or two at y^e moost, but the shorter the better. We call them *posies*, and do paint them now-a-dayes upon the back-sides of our trenchers of wood, or use them as devices in armes or in rings.”¹

Shakspere mentions the *posy* of a ring. In *Hamlet*, when Prologue enters, he thus addresses the King.²

Prologue. For us and for our tragedy,
Here stooping to your clemency,
We beg your hearing patiently !
Hamlet. Is this the prologue, or the *posy* of a ring ?
Ophelia. ’Tis brief, my lord !
Hamlet. As woman’s love !

Again, in the *Merchant of Venice*—

Portia. A quarrel, ho, already ! what’s the matter ?
Gratiano. About a ring, a paltry hoop of gold,
That she did give me, whose *posie* was,
For all the world, like cutlers’ poetry
Upon a knife, *Love me and leave me not.* ³

Peele, a poet of the time of Elizabeth, calls the motto of the Garter a *posy*. He says—

Dead is Bedford.

* * * *

This tale I thought upon told me for truth,

¹ See the notices of such inscribed and painted fruit-trenchers in this *Journal*, vol. iii. p. 334.

² *Hamlet*, act. iii. scene ii.

³ *Merchant of Venice*, act v. scene i.

The rather that it praised the *posye*,
 Right grave and honourable, that importeth much,—
 “ Evil be to him,” it says, “ that evil thinks.”⁴

Old Tusser, who wrote in the time of Henry VIII., gives what he calls the Innholder’s posy,—Husbandry posies for the Hall,—Posies for the Parlour,—Posies for the Guest’s Chamber,—Posies for thine own bed-chamber, &c.⁵

Herrick distinctly shows that, in his day, posies were used for nuptial rings :

What posies for our wedding-rings,
 What gloves we’ll give, and ribainings.⁶

A silver Florentine ring, in my collection, has in niello—
 ERVNT · DVO · IN · CARNE · VNA.

Another, a silver ring of Florentine work, ornamented with niello, has, on the bezel, the head of Medusa, on one of the shoulders, the initial A, and on the other, G ; while around the hoop is—LA · VIRTU · FA :—at the end of which is a sprig of the orpine or love plant, called *amore*, consequently the posy read as follows,—LA · VIRTU · FA · L’AMORE. Another silver ring has the alliterative posy—LET · LIKING · LAST. A similar example is preserved in the Londesborough collection.⁷

Among rings of this class in my collection one bears—

R

TIME · DEVM · ME · AMA · QD · I E ·

the concluding letters possibly signifying QUOD, or QUOTH, I. R. and E. R., the initials of the wedded couple, in accordance with the well-known practice of thus placing the initial of the surname above those of the Christian names. Thus the ring would express that both husband and wife, respectively, adopted the sentiment, Fear God, and Love me. On another is inscribed— · REMEMBAR · THE [a heart] · THAT · IS · IN · PAYNE · with the initials M and B as a monogram. On a ring of bronze are the words—EVER · LOVE : two rings are inscribed with the following posies, “ In constancie, I

⁴ Quoted by Doran, *Knights and their Days*, p. 159.

⁵ *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandry*, by Thomas Tusser : edit. by Dr. Mavor, pp. 283, 287, &c.

⁶ Herrick’s *Hesperides*, p. 252. See

notes to Brand, *Popular Antiquities*, under *Bride Favours*.

⁷ *Catalogue of Lady Londesborough’s Collection of Rings*, No. 34. Mr. Crofton Croker thought this example may be as early as the time of Henry VIII.

live and die ;" and—" My promise paste shall always laste." Another simply conveys the admonition—" Love the truth." I possess also a very diminutive ring, set with a diamond, and within is inscribed,— " this spark will grow."

Some of the posies on betrothal rings express a very proper devotional feeling. I have seen one with the posy—" In Christe and thee—my comfort be." This was handed down for three generations, and may recall the passage in Shakspeare regarding Bertram's ring.⁸

Diana. He does me wrong, my lord ; if I were so
He might have bought me at a common price.
Do not believe him. O, behold this ring,
Whose high respect and rich validity
Did lack a parallel ; yet, for all that,
He gave it to a commoner of the camp,
If I be one.

Count. He blushes, and 'tis it.
Of six preceding ancestors, that gem
Conferr'd by testament to the sequent issue
Hath it been ow'd and worn. This is his wife ;
That ring's a thousand proofs.

Lord Braybrooke has in his collection many posy rings of the seventeenth century. The following examples of the inscriptions engraved within their hoops may suffice.⁹

O lord us bless	As God decreed	Happy in thee
In happiness.	So we agreed.	Has God made me.

I have seen a gold posy ring inscribed—*MVLIER · VIRO · SVBIECTA · ESTO* : and Lord Braybrooke has another with the motto—*LOVE AND OBYE*, evidently showing that there should be no mistake in regard of authority !

Some posies again express anything but refined taste or religious feeling. Dr. John Thomas, who was Bishop of Lincoln in 1753, married four times. The posy he selected or composed for the ring to be used on the last occasion was coarsely characteristic of the man and of the times.¹

⁸ All's Well that Ends Well, act v. sceue ii.

⁹ See notices of other examples found in Essex, described as "Globe Poesy Rings," in Lord Braybrooke's collection ; Transactions of the Essex Archæological Society, vol. ii. p. 67.

¹ Edwards on Rings, p. 221. This anecdote of Bishop John Thomas may recall to our remembrance the Wife of Bath, who gloried that—

"Husbands at church doore have
I had five !"

If I survive,
I'll make them five.

It has been well observed, that, if the following lines of Herrick were not too long, they would form the most appropriate posy ever devised.

And as this round
Is nowhere found
To flaw, or else to sever,
So may our love
As endless prove,
As pure as gold for ever.²

Under the head of posy rings should be classed the Hebrew wedding rings, which generally have a sentiment engraved on them, conveying the expression of good wishes. Selden,³ Leo of Modena,⁴ and Basnage⁵ are all of opinion that the use of the wedding ring did not exist in the Mosaic days; and no mention is made of it by the Talmudists. Ugolini,⁶ in his great work, mentions that it was used in his time; whilst Basnage has stated, that formerly a piece of money was given as a pledge, for which, at a later period, a ring was substituted. Leo of Modena says that the ring was rarely used, and that neither the Italian nor the German Jews habitually used it, some did, but the majority did not; and Selden states that the wedding ring came into general use with the Jews, after they saw it was everywhere prevalent. On these rings there was generally engraved in Hebrew characters, *Mazul*, or *Mausselauf*, Joy be with you!⁷ Ugolini considers this inscription or posy to be of Syrian origin. *Mazul*, he says, does not signify a star, but any place in the heavens, at the pleasure of astronomers ("mathematici").

Fortuna Bona was regarded as a God by the Greeks and the Romans, who were accustomed to dedicate altars to the ΑΓΑΘΗ ΤΥΧΗ:

Plutarch observes, "διὰ τὴν Ῥωμαῖοι Τύχην σέβονται Πριμυγενειαν,

² Herrick's *Hesperides*, p. 72, cited in the notes to "Ring and Bride-cake;" Brand's *Observations on Popular Antiquities*.

³ *Uxor Heb.*, 190.

⁴ *History of the Rites, Customs, &c., of the Jews*. The work was translated by E. Chilmead, London, 1650.

⁵ 111. 819.

⁶ *Thes. Antiqu. Sacr.* Vol. xxx. p. 70.

⁷ See the Catalogue of Lady Lonsborough's Collection, Nos. 6, 13, 16—20, &c. Examples of Jewish Nuptial Rings are also preserved in Lord Braybrooke's Collection; two of them are engraved with Hebrew characters, which may be read *Mazul-taww* or *Mausselauf*, joy be with you. See Lord Braybrooke's Catalogue, printed for private distribution, Nos. 206, 245, 250.

ἦν ἅν τις εἴποι πρωτογένειαν.”⁸ And Ugolini quotes an inscription at Præneste, in which Venus and *Fortuna Primigenia* are named together.—

VENERI ET
FORTVN · PRIM ·
SACR ·

I have seen none of these Jewish rings of a date earlier than the sixteenth century. There are four specimens in my collection, each of which has some peculiar and different characteristics. Fine examples are rare, but ordinary ones are comparatively of common occurrence.

In Italy may still be found many rings of the *sei cento* period, of a peculiar type ; the bezel is formed of a bouquet or posy of flowers, composed of rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and diamonds. Sometimes in the centre there are represented two hearts surmounted by a coronet ; and sometimes again the bezel is made of two strips of gold, fashioned into the form of hearts and intertwined, surmounted also by a coronet. These rings the Italians call “*giardinetti*,” literally, posies, in the secondary sense of the term, as denoting a nosegay. Specimens are in my Dactyliotheca.

Treating of Italian majolica, Mr. Marryat observes,⁹ “It was the custom among Italians to interchange presents of plates, or other specimens of majolica, and these were always painted with subjects appropriate to the occasion ; of these there was one class, called *amatorii*, consisting generally of plates, jugs, or deep saucers, upon which the cavalier caused to be painted the portrait of his lady. Underneath was inscribed her Christian name, with the complimentary addition of *bella*, after this manner — MINERVA · BELLA—CECILIA · BELLA.

“These pieces were presented as pledges of affection, and sent filled with sweetmeats. The portraits are interesting, as giving the costume of the period.

“Sometimes, instead of the portrait, we find represented hands united, and hearts in flame.

“Thus, on one, we have two hands clasped over a fire, and above, a golden heart pierced by two darts.

“On a saucer, a youth kissing a lady and giving her a flower—*Dulce est amare*.

⁸ Plutarch in the *Quæstiones Romani*, c. ii. 106.

VOL. XVI.

⁹ Pottery and Porcelain, p. 39 *et seq.*, ed. 1857.

"Sometimes, instead of the name of the lady, we have some motto or moral sentiment. Thus, a lady with a large pink—Non è sì vago el fiore che non imbiacca o casca.

"And again :—

"A female, probably symbolical of purity—Chi serve Dio con purità di core, vive contento, e poi salvato muore.

"Per dormire non si acquista.¹

"Penso nel mio afflitto core.

"Un bel morire è vita, e gloria, e fama.

"Nemo sua sorte contentus erat."

Thus far Mr. Marryat. I have quoted at length, because what he says serves to illustrate a most interesting class of rings, little known to English archæologists.

It is very reasonable to suppose that the fair damsel would not allow all the attentions of her cavalier to pass unrequited, and without some *gage d'amour* on her part. What would be more acceptable to him than the portrait of his innamorata? What manner of wearing it more convenient and unobtrusive than delineated on a ring? And what symbol more fit for the pledge of eternal constancy, than the *fede*, or two right hands joined?

The rings to which I allude are made of silver, and inlaid with niello. I consider them of Florentine work; the date assigned to them may be from 1460 to 1520 or thereabouts. They have the bezel either oval or circular; the shoulders of the hoop are shaped so as to form representations of sleeves, from each of which issues a right hand, and the hands clasp together at the back. These rings vary in execution, but in general design they are the same. Some have plain hoops without the sleeves and the *fede*. On the bezel is represented the head of a lady in profile, and in every case with a flower or a posy under her nose: the ground work of the bezel and of the sleeves is filled up with niello. Of these rings I am so fortunate as to possess eight examples; those which have plain hoops appear to be of finer execution than the others. From their size they were evidently intended to be worn by a man. These rings I consider to have been *gages d'amour* from the ladies to their cavaliers, in return possibly for the plates of preserved fruits and sweetmeats, or *dolci*.

With the exception of those in my Dactyliotheca, and

Compare our English proverb, "Faint heart never won fair ladye."

two which formerly belonged to Mr. George Isaacs, and are now in the Londesborough collection, I know of no rings of this pleasing class. Indeed they seem to be extremely rare. The late Mr. T. Crofton Croker, describing one of these rings in Lord Londesborough's possession (no. 29), has called it a gimmel ring, and conceived the head to be that of Lucretia. He has expressed himself as follows—"This seems to be the kind of ring mentioned in *Twelfth Night*, act ii. sc. 5, where Malvolio, breaking open the letter purporting to be in his mistress's handwriting, says—

"By your leave, wax! Soft!—and the impressure her Lucrece, with which she use to seal."

Mr. Crofton Croker continues—"Mr. Knight adduces this passage as one of the many evidences of Shakespeare's familiarity with ancient works of art, in common with the best educated of his time, and not being acquainted with a ring of this kind, has engraved, as an illustration, a head of Lucretia from an antique gem."

I regret that I cannot receive this explanation offered by Mr. Crofton Croker, since he must have overlooked that it would be wholly impossible to obtain an impression of a Lucrece from a perfectly smooth surface; for in all these rings the bezels are quite level; indeed, this will be evident to those who are familiar with the peculiarities of the art of niellure.



Roman posy-ring, of gold, found near Corbridge.

In the Collection of His Grace the Duke of Northumberland.

AEMILIA ZESSES.—Long live Emilia!