

SHORTER NOTICES

SILVER AND GOLD ROMAN FINGER RING FROM WATTON, NORFOLK

by Martin Henig, M.A., D.Phil, F.S.A.,
and Flt. Lt. R. A. Brown, R.A.F.

Introduction

On 22nd February 1976 Flt. Lt. Robin Brown picked up a small blackened object on a Romano-British site near Watton, Norfolk. Immediate examination suggested that it might be a finger ring, and through the blackened surface there was some evidence of gold.

A more careful examination later showed that it was a finger ring of the Roman period, made of silver with a gold inset plate.

Description

The ring itself is made of silver, having a plain hoop, rounded on the outside, but flat within. The broad shoulders project slightly so that, when viewed from above, it presents an oblong profile with rounded ends. Its size and weight suggests that it was a man's ring.

The setting consists of an oval plate of gold attached to the bezel by means of a silver band. The gold has been raised to produce a cameo in the form of a youthful bust in profile to the left. The face is of a young man with hair curly and tightly bunched, but unfortunately the cameo has suffered considerable wear and much of the detail is now lost.

However a *caduceus* is clearly visible emerging from behind the right shoulder and this identifies the bust as that of the god Mercury. Similar representations are common on engraved gems and are ultimately based on some sculptural prototype of the fourth century B.C.¹

Gold settings are not very common on Roman rings and examples are somewhat scarce in Britain. The only other such bezel from Norfolk is attached to a bronze hoop and depicts Cupid and Psyche.² A gold bezel without its ring was found at Leicester and depicts *Bonus Eventus*, and others from Cirencester,

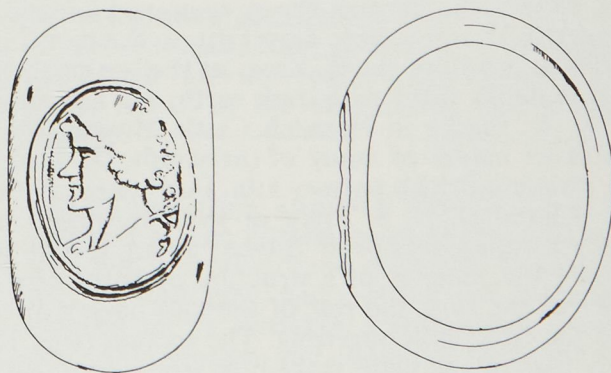


Fig. 1

Drawings of the Watton Roman finger ring: scale 2/1

Selsey and Richborough, either loose or in gold rings, portray clasped hands.³ A ring of second century form, from Konia in Asia Minor, has a head of Hercules in relief, as do two first century rings from a hoard discovered at Zurich in Switzerland.⁴

The dimensions of the ring are as follows: height 16mm; length 24mm; width across bezel 13mm; dimensions across bezel 14mm by 9mm; weight 9.150mg.

Conclusions

Rings of this form developed in the Antonine period from a more attenuated variety with narrow shoulders, typical of the late first or early second century A.D.⁵

The date of manufacture of this ring would however appear to lie in the second half of the second century A.D.

The findspot gives little hint as to the circumstances in which the ring came to be lost, but it appears unlikely that it was deliberately hidden.

January 1978

¹M. Henig, *A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites*. BAR 8, Oxford 1974, part II, page 13 and plate ii No. 37; G. M. A. Richter, *Metropolitan Museum of Art New York. Catalogue of Engraved Gems Greek, Etruscan and Roman* 1956, page 72 and plate xli No. 291. In very general terms the head might be compared with that of the famous Hermes of Praxiteles at Olympia, cf A. W. Lawrence *Greek and Roman Sculpture*, London 1972, pages 185-187 and plate xlvii, a.

²Henig, part II, page 99 and plate xxii No. 763 and references cited.

³Henig, part II, 100f Nos. 765, 775 plates xxii and lii, 777 and 778.

⁴F. H. Marshall, *Catalogue of the Finger Rings Greek, Etruscan and Roman in the Department of Antiquities British Museum*, London 1907, page 185 and plate xxix No. 1172; F. Henkel, *Die römischen Finger-ringe der Rheinlande*, Berlin 1913, page 12f and plate iv, Nos. 82 and 83.

⁵Marshall, plate xlv Type E XVII; Henkel, page 57 and plate xxi, Nos. 414 and 416; Henig, part I, page 48 and fig. i Type V, part II, plate xxviii, Nos. 116. The earlier form is represented by Marshall, plate xlv, Type E III and Henig part I, page 47 and fig. i Type III, part II, plate xxxvii No. 381.

EARLY ROMANO-BRITISH POTTERY PRODUCTION AT THORPE ST. ANDREW, NORWICH

by Tony Gregory (Field Officer, Norfolk Archaeological Unit)

In the winter of 1938-9 Dr. Norman Davey examined a feature in the west end of the north face of the Thorpe village gravel pit on the east side of Pound Lane, at 50ft. O.D. and 500m. north of the R. Yare; 'at the top of the working face was a trench about 3ft. in depth filled with dark earth, ash and sherds' (note by Dr. Davey quoted by R. R. Clarke in Norwich Castle Museum records). From the underfired and distorted nature of many of the sherds, Dr. Davey interpreted the trench as part of a Romano-British pottery kiln. Further excavation of the feature by S. S. (now Prof.) and D. H. S. Frere in 1943 recovered more sherds, and burnt clay including a square-sectioned fire-bar about a foot long. One end of the feature contained the remains of a structure of burnt clay which was interpreted as the corner of the flue, the rest of the kiln having disappeared into the gravel pit and only the stoke-hole surviving. The section (Fig. 1) shows a second feature immediately east of the main stoke-hole which contained similar pottery. The only detailed records which survive seem to be notes and a sketched section by Prof. Frere (now in the Library of the Surrey Archaeological Society and