

# A SILVER FINGER-RING FROM WINCHESTER WHARF, SOUTHWARK

by  
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The ring came to light in 1972 on the Thames foreshore at Winchester Wharf, on the south side of the Thames between London Bridge and Southwark Bridge.<sup>1</sup>

Although there are no stratigraphical indications of date, the form of the piece and the device engraved on its bezel are characteristic of the Roman period. A band of silver expands from c. 3mm at the narrowest point to 8mm at the shoulders. These are not very pronounced and the form of the ring is basically that of a circle, slightly flattened (internal measurements, width 18mm; height 16mm; external measurements, width 21mm; height 19mm). Simple rings of this type are not likely to be later than the middle of the second century A.D.<sup>2</sup>

A stylised branch is engraved in intaglio on the flat, ovoid bezel (dimensions, 11mm by 8mm). This would have been identified as a palm-spray if it were not for the pellets (perhaps representing fruit or berries) at the ends of the projections.<sup>3</sup> A number of rings are published which depict virtually identical branches.<sup>4</sup>

It should be pointed out that the exact type, at least as a signet-device, has not previously been recorded from Britain. A gold ring found near the church of All Hallows, Lombard Street, bears an incised palm of normal type, and other palms are recorded from elsewhere in Britain.<sup>5</sup>

In these cases the motif must signify success and victory in some enterprise, and it is tempting to invoke the same quasi-amuletic function here, even if the plant may be a bay or an olive rather than a palm.<sup>6</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The ring is in private possession. I am most grateful to Mr. Hugh Chapman and the owner for bringing the ring to my attention and to the Museum of London for the photograph.

<sup>2</sup> For the type, cf. J. P. Bushe-Fox *Excavations on the Site of the Roman Town at Wroxeter, Shropshire III* Society of Antiquaries Reports No. 4 (London 1916) 30, Plate 18, No. 29 (early second century context). M. Henig *A Corpus of Roman Engraved Gemstones from British Sites* British Archaeological Reports 8 (1974) Part 1 Fig. 1, ring type III, cf. 47 f.

<sup>3</sup> A very similar motif is found in ancient British coins of the Dobunni, cf. R. P. Mack *The Coinage of Ancient Britain* (London 1953) 111 Plate 23 ff., Nos. 385-393. The pellets can, presumably, be explained as a deliberate ornamentation (of a debased laurel wreath as worn by Apollo on the prototype coins) by means of the point of the drill. It is not clear whether the die-

cutter attached any especial significance to this and we may doubt whether there is any *real* connexion between these coins and our ring.

<sup>4</sup> A de Ridder *Collection de Clercq. vii (II). Pierres Gravées* (Paris 1911) 752 ff. and Plate 28 Nos. 3398, 3402, 3408 f. H. Hoffmann and V. von Claer *Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg. Antiker Gold- und Silberschmuck* (Mainz 1968) 184 No. 124. F. Henkel *Die Römischen Fingerringe der Rheinlande* (Berlin 1913) 49 Plate 18 No. 352 (Vandoeuvres, Geneva).

<sup>5</sup> Henig *op. cit.* Part II, 100 and Plate 22 No. 768 ff. (Slay Hill Saltings) are especially relevant as silver rings approximating to Type III. The London ring, No. 770, is illustrated in *London in Roman Times*, London Museum Catalogue No. 3 (London 1930) Fig. 30, No. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Henig *op. cit.* No. 772, for example, is surely a love-charm.