

A LATE SAXON GLASS FINGER RING FROM THE CITY OF LONDON

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It is the intention of this note to describe a finger ring (Fig. 1), recently recognised as a late Saxon artefact as a result of research carried out by Justine Bayley of the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. At present, this ring is the only example of late Saxon glass of English manufacture known from London but it is to be hoped that further examples will now be recognised.

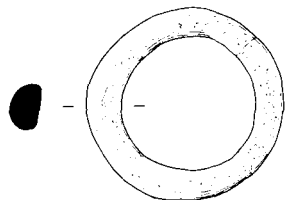


Fig. 1 Late Saxon glass finger ring (1/1)

The discovery that glass trinkets were made in this country in the late Saxon period comes as a result of recent work on 10th-century urban settlements. Glass rings (and sometimes beads) have been found stratified in 10th-century contexts at Hereford, Gloucester, Lincoln, Oxford, Winchester and York (Bayley, 1982). No later associated examples are known and the technique therefore seems to have died out well before the Norman conquest. At many of these sites evidence for the working of this glass has been found. Examination of the glass artefacts and of crucibles used in its working using x-ray fluorescence (XRF) shows that it has a very high lead content. Such a high-lead glass has a very low melting point and can be prepared using a simple furnace. The refractory clays used for the crucibles need not have such a high softening point as is required for the

melting of copper alloys, for example. Where not subsequently weathered to an opaque white material the glass is usually a very pale brown or yellow colour, caused by the presence of iron. This is probably the result of using impure, local quartz sands rather than the iron-free sands and sandstones favoured by post-medieval glassmakers.

The London finger ring was found at the Poultry and was obtained by the London Museum in 1925 (Accession Number A27897) Fig. 1. Two other artefacts obtained at the same time were a bone implement (though to be Roman) and a late 13th or early 14th-century Mill Green coarseware cooking pot (Pearce *et al.*, 1982, Fig. 16 No. 46). These three finds are likely to be from the same site but are not stratigraphically associated. The Poultry is at the east end of the market at West Cheap (Cheapside), an area where 10th-century occupation is likely to have been intense. The ring has a D-section and was probably formed by piercing and rolling a blob of glass rather than looping a 'sausage' of glass into a circle. XRF analysis failed to reveal any constituents other than lead and a trace of iron. Light elements, such as silica and alkalis were not detectable under the analytical conditions used.

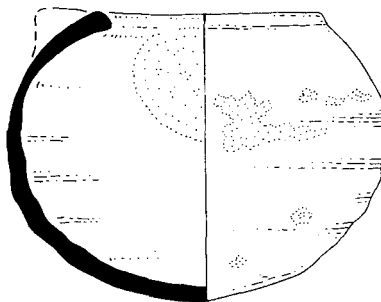


Fig. 2 Saxon pottery (1/2)

Only one vessel has been found which might have been associated with the manufacture of late Saxon lead glass (Fig. 2). This was a thin-walled wheelthrown pot made in a hard, white fabric with moderate quartz sand temper, found in 1982 at Pudding Lane in the backfill of a sunken-feature building, associated with late 10th to early 11th-century pottery. This vessel has thick dribbles of yellowish lead glass on the walls and a pool of similar glass in the base. Despite these traces it is difficult to visualise how the pot could have functioned as a glass-making or melting crucible. Firstly, the capacity of the vessel was calculated to be approx. 366 cc. This is greater than might be expected for a glass making crucible, causing problems in keeping the melt liquid. Secondly, the walls of the pot are thinner than is normal in late Saxon or early medieval crucibles and there is no outer coating of local clay, such as was sometimes used to strengthen and lag copper working crucibles. Finally, either melting or making glass would have produced a more extensive glass cover on the inside of the vessel.

It therefore remains a possibility, if not a probability, that the Poultry ring was made in London but the proof that such glass was being made in the City remains to be found.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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