

ROMAN GEMS AND FINGER-RINGS MADE OF GOLD AND GLASS FROM NICAEA
IN BITHYNIA (SOUTH-EASTERN MARMARA)

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Dedicated to the 77th birthday of Maurizio Buora

ABSTRACT: In this brief paper 22 objects comprising Roman engraved gemstones and finger-rings made of both gold and glass are presented, all of which are curated in the Archaeological Museum of İznik in south-eastern Marmara, Turkey. These objects are significant as very few gemstones have been published from Bithynia. Two of the finds were excavated from a necropolis area of Nicaea. A catalogue of these artefacts will be provided at the end of this paper.

ABSTRAKT (Rzymskie gemmy i pierścionki ze złota i szkła z Nicei w Bitynii [południowo-wschodnia część regionu Marmara]): W tym krótkim artykule zaprezentowano 22 rzymskie grawerowane gemmy, złote i szklane pierścionki, które znajdują się w Muzeum Archeologicznym w İzniku w południowo-wschodniej części regionu Marmara w Turcji. Są to istotne eksponaty, ponieważ bardzo niewiele kamieni szlachetnych z Bitynii doczekało się publikacji na swój temat. Dwa spośród znalezisk odkryto na terenie nekropolii w Nicei. Na końcu artykułu zostały opisane złote i szklane pierścionki znajdujące się we wspomnianym muzeum.

ÖZET (Nikaia ve Bithynia'dan Roma Dönemi'ne Ait Bazı Gliptik Buluntular ile Altın ve Cam Yüzükler): Bu kısa yazıda İznik Arkeoloji Müzesi'nde saklanmakta olan Roma Dönemi'ne ait 22 adet gliptik örneği ile altın ve cam yüzükler tanıtılmaktadır. Bu çalışma Bithynia Bölgesi'nden şu ana değin çok az sayıda değerli taş yayımlandığı için önemlidir. İznik Müzesi'nde bulunan buluntulardan ikisi Nikaia Örenyeri'nin nekropollerinde ortaya çıkarılmıştır. Makalenin sonunda bu müzede bulunan altın ve cam yüzükler da tanıtılacaktır.

KEYWORDS: engraved gems, intaglio, cameo, gold finger-rings, glass finger-rings, İznik, Nicaea, Bithynia, Asia Minor, south-eastern Marmara, Roman period, Graeco-Roman glyptics, Anatolian archaeology, classical archaeology

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: gemmy, intaglio, kamea, złote pierścienie, szklane pierścienie, İznik, Nicaea, Bitynia, Azja Mniejsza, południowo-wschodnia część regionu Marmara, okres rzymski, gliptyka grecko-rzymska, archeologia anatolijska, archeologia klasyczna

ANAHTAR KELİMELER: Gliptik buluntular, intaglio, kameo, altın yüzükler, cam yüzükler, İznik, Nikaia, Bithynia, Güneydoğu Marmara Bölgesi, Roma Dönemi, Antik Yunan-Roma gliptik sanatı, Anadolu arkeolojisi, klasik arkeoloji

1. Introduction

There are many unpublished engraved gems in the museums of İznik (ancient Nicaea) and İzmit (ancient Nicomedia),¹ both of which are located within the territory of ancient Bithynia in south-

¹ For the gems from the Archaeological Museum of Kocaeli, cf. Laflı, Henig 2023. Furthermore, in the Anatolian jewellery catalogue by Yıldız Akyay Meriçboyu two Hellenistic engraved figural gems from Nicomedia in the collections of the Archaeological Museums of Istanbul have been published, cf. Akyay Meriçboyu 2001, 181, fig. 1: a gold seal-ring with a garnet intaglio inset female portrait, found during the construction of the SEKA paper factory in Nicomedia (**fig. 1a**). A female head, with a neat coiffure and a prominent bun of hair behind. She appears to be wearing a diadem and earrings. This may be a portrait of Arsinoe III, sister and wife of Ptolemy IV (221–204 BC), cf. Kraay, Hirmer 1966, 382 and pl. 220, no. 808. Comparable to a glass intaglio in the British Museum, acc. no. GR 1917.5-1.1615 published in Walker, Higgs 2001, 98–99, no. 118, and engraved on a gold ring Gerring 2000, 163, no. 13/7, fig. 104, but not wearing a diadem so in this case probably a private individual. Also cf. Gerring 2000, 179, figs 4a–b: a gold ring set with a carnelian intaglio depicting Athena found in Nicomedia, dated to the mid-third century BC (**fig. 1b**). Athena stands half frontally but to the right. She is helmeted, holds a vertical sceptre in her right hand and supports a shield on the ground with her left hand. For Athena on a carnelian in a similar ring see Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 28 and pl. 42, no. 104.



Map 1

-eastern Marmara (ancient Propontis) in north-western Turkey (map 1).² In this paper 22 objects comprising engraved gems and finger-rings made of both gold and glass from the Archaeological Museum of İznik are discussed. This preliminary work contains material of local importance, now being made

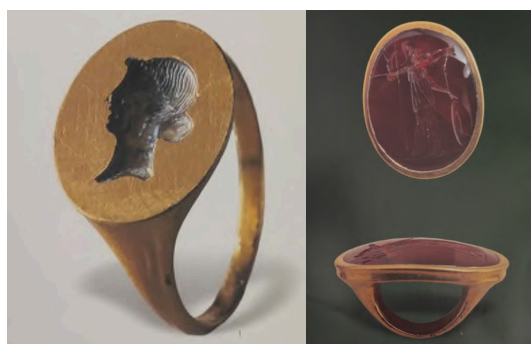


Fig. 1a

Fig. 1b

the scholarly world for the first time, although in most cases the objects lack stratigraphical context and have to be dated stylistically. We have already published a catalogue of the earrings,³ and a corpus of fibulae from the same museum.⁴ A comprehensive study of all such small finds would provide important information about the material culture of Nicaea and other sites in Bithynia during the Roman period.



Fig. 1c

The entry for each gem is given as completely as possible and includes at a minimum the following information: catalogue number and reference to illustrations (within parentheses) in boldface, the museum accession number, the material of the gem and its present condition, the facts concerning its discovery, dimensions, a description, and its date. Comparanda are listed in some main publications where applicable. Complete bibliographies are given for two finds which have been previously published.

Detailed physical descriptions of the objects are offered for two reasons: the generally very poor state of photographs, which obscures important details in their reproduction; and the importance of individual depictions.

² There are also engraved gems and jewellery from the sites in and around ancient Nicaea in the township of İznik conserved in the Archaeological Museums of Istanbul, Bursa and elsewhere, also abroad: in the above mentioned jewellery catalogue of the Istanbul Museums only one Roman gem set in a gold finger-ring with deep bezel from Nicaea has been published among the other gold finger-rings set with engraved and non-engraved gemstones (fig. 1c), cf. Akyay Meriçboyu 2001, 180, fig. 1. For a parallel see Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 25, no. 80.

³ Cf. Kaya, Albayrak, Henig, Lafli 2024.

⁴ Cf. Kaya, Albayrak, Lafli, Buora 2024.

The rationale for assigning a gem to a particular century is based on general observations, parallels, and style; therefore, the dates should be considered merely as rough approximations. In our opinion, as imprecise as such proposed datings may be, it is better to assign a probable date than to offer no suggestion at all.

The Byzantine cemetery in the theatre of Nicaea, a mass burial site that is characterised by its disregard of traditional Byzantine burial customs, happens to be the best documented cemetery of ancient and Byzantine Nicaea, since it has been systematically unearthed and studied by archaeologists since the mid-1980s, but there are almost no small finds from the site, and certainly no gems. The only find from this site to feature in our catalogue is entry no. 3, which was excavated from trench 53 of the theatre of Nicaea. However, no further information about its discovery is known.

Unfortunately, very few small finds are known from the cemeteries of Nicaea in general, most of which lie outside the city (e.g. Hisardere) along the routes leading into it from all directions. In recent years the Turkish team has also been involved with the excavation of an extra mural Roman cemetery of Nicaea, where it discovered several marble sarcophagi of high quality. Catalogue entries 6 and 14 were excavated from a burial in the necropolis area of Hisardere, probably a peribolos, which is located 1.2 km inland from Lake Ascania (modern İznik Gölü) and 2.4 km north of Nicaea. The exact original location in the burial was not fully published, but typologically they belong to the third and fourth centuries AD.

Besides the two aforementioned objects no other gem has been published from these excavations in Nicaea, and no gem engraver is known from the region.

It seems that the members of Altınölçek family (which literally means “gold scale”), who sold most of the items from this catalogue to the Archaeological Museum of İznik, were involved not only with the trading of antiquities from a wide range of places throughout Turkey, but that they probably also produced imitations which were then sold to Turkish museums; that is likely to be the case for catalogue entries 4, 8 and 18. A smaller group of finds, other than gems, was acquired from Mr Emin Altınölçek, an active jeweller and goldsmith in Bursa and Istanbul during the 1960s and 1970s, who also published a picture book on ancient Nicaea with three other Turkish authors in 1963.⁵

Several gold finger-rings set with plain stones and glass rings conserved in the Archaeological Museum of İznik are published at the end of our paper. These display a variety of techniques and range from simple shapes to top-of-the-line craftsmanship.

⁵ Cf. Kargıner, Keresteci, Altınölçek, Savaş 1963.

2. Catalogue of engraved gems in the Archaeological Museum of İznik

Intaglios

No. 1 (figs 2a–b): Head of Apollo.



Fig. 2a



Fig. 2b

Acc. no. 2098.

Cornelian. The upper surface was bleached prior to engraving so that the head stands out clearly in the deep red of the lower ground. Ellipsoid shape. Intact and well-preserved with some incrustation.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 28 November 1977.

Dimensions. H. 7 mm, W. 6 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 0.14 gr.

Description. Youthful male head to the left, wearing a laurel wreath indicated by two strokes, or a diadem. The locks of hair at the back fall in a series of plaits down the nape of his neck.

Comparanda. Henig, Whiting 1987, nos. 43 and 44; Henig, MacGregor 2004, no. 1.12; Zwierlein-Diehl 1979, no. 1272.

Dating. The technique of bleaching the surface of a carnelian gem prior to engraving seems quite distinctive for Roman gems originating from Asia Minor, see, for example, Arslan and Konuk 2000, nos. 5, 68 (not brown nicolo but bleached carnelian), and nos. 109 and 122 (both also bleached carnelian). Essentially, this technique was designed to produce the same sort of bi-coloured surface as nicolo, which is, in fact, a double-layered sardonyx or chalcedony treated

with heat. This gem, with its bevelled edges on the upper surface, also imitates nicolo which was much more popular in the second and third centuries AD. According to Marianne Maaskant-Kleibrink's typology of styles in 1978, this gem should be ascribed to her 'Incoherent Grooves Style'. All these factors suggest that the gem dates to the second century AD.

No. 2 (figs 3a–b): Combination gem.

Acc. no. 907.

Burgundy coloured carnelian set in a bronze finger-ring.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 29 May 1968.

Dimensions. L. 19 mm, d. 1 mm, diam. 8 mm, th. 10 mm, Wg. 1.3 gr.

Description. The intaglio depicts the bearded head of Silenus which is conjoined with the youthful head of Pan with horns branching from his brows. The ring has an ovoid, narrow hoop,

and the gem which is raised above the surface of the bezel is mounted on its side, so possibly a secondary mounting.

Comparanda. For the intaglio note Pan's very small goat-like horns, as in Konuk, Arslan 2000, no. 157; Guiraud 1988, no. 898 (from Saintes); Henig 1994, no. 355. The ring is similar to the silver ring in Konuk, Arslan 2000, no. 145; also note the bronze ring, as in Konuk, Arslan 2000, no. 95.

Dating. Intaglio second century AD; ring probably third century AD.



Fig. 3a



Fig. 3b

No. 3 (figs 4a–b): Tyche.

Acc. no. 2846.

Red cornelian set in a gold finger-ring, which is of ellipsoid shape with a flat ribbon hoop expanding towards the raised, ovoid box bezel. The ring is broken in one place due to crushing but is otherwise intact and well-preserved with some incrustation.

Provenance. Excavated on 1 September 1989 from trench 53 of the theatre of Nicaea.

Dimensions of ring. Diam. 12 mm, W. 7 mm, H. 9 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 2,15 gr.

Ring type. The ring is comparable to Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 33, no. 149 and Johns, Potter 1983, 91–92, no. 16, both dated to the fourth century AD, and like the latter ring the intaglio is mounted on its side which strongly suggests a secondary use.

Description. The gem has received partial bleaching, which certainly occurred post engraving and was not (as in the case of entry no. 1) an element of its manufacture. The bleaching was most likely due to exposure to great heat, for example through burning on a funeral pyre with its deceased owner, which suggests that the gem may have been found in a burial.

The intaglio depicts Tyche Panthea with her cornucopia, standing to the right, holding the steering oar of a rudder and a poppy head and ear of wheat in one hand, thus equating her with Demeter.

Comparanda. This is a very common type, see for example Konuk, Arslan 2000, nos. 85 and 86; Middleton 2001, no. 22 acquired near Sadak (ancient Satala) in the province of Gümüşhane in north-eastern Turkey; Henig, Whiting 1987, nos. 102–108; Dimitrova-Milcheva 1981, no. 88; Henig 2007, nos. 322 and 323; Dembski 2012, nos. 328–334; Gołyźniak 2017, no. 364.



Fig. 4a



Fig. 4b

Dating. The intaglio corresponds to Maaskant-Kleibrink's 'Imperial Cap-with rim style' but the workmanship here is rather clumsy, which is suggestive of a date as late as the early third century AD; the ring is of a fourth-century AD form.

No. 4 (figs 5a–b): Squatting quadruped.



Fig. 5a

Acc. no. 2099.

Citrine.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 28 November 1977.

Dimensions. H. 7 mm, W. 5 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 0.13 gr.

Description. A quadruped with straight horns, a goat or an antelope sitting to the left, its head turned to the right.

Comparanda. Henig 2007, 196, no. App. 28 (from Vindolanda); Maaskant-Kleibrink 1986, 78, no. 151 (from Nijmegen).

Dating. Third century AD, if not a counterfeit, datable to the mid-20th century as suggested by the schematic and unconvincing drill strokes applied within the engraved image of the goat.



Fig. 5b

No. 5 (figs 6a–b): Clasped hands.



Fig. 6a

Acc. no. 2101.

Citrine.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 28 November 1977.

Dimensions. H. 6 mm, W. 11 mm, Th. 3 mm, Wg. 0.38 gr.

Description. *Dextrarum iunctio* which signifies unity between two people, symbolising betrothal, marriage or friendship.

Comparanda. Dimitrova-Milcheva 1981, no. 241; Platz-Horster 1994, no. 349; Gesztelyi 2000, nos. 239–243.

Dating. Second-third century AD.



Fig. 6b

No. 6 (figs 7a–c): Frog.

Acc. no. 5172, excavation acc. no. iHN'19, find no. 2.

Black glass?

Set in a gold finger-ring, with a simple hoop and raised bezel.

Provenance. Excavated on 30 September 2019 from the vaulted burial chamber O-13/14 in the Hisardere necropolis, discovered (along with entry 14) at an elevation of 96.71m.

Dimensions. Diam. 21 mm, H. 8.2 mm, W. 8.5 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 0.14 gr.

Description. The frog is depicted from above; it has bulging eyes and a plump body.

The ring has a simple hoop with a raised octagonal bezel, comparable to Chadour 1994, 137, nos. 470 and 471 which are dated to the fifth century AD. Raised box bezels set with gems are often mounted on third century AD rings, see Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 29, no. 117 as well as in the fourth-century AD Thetford Treasure from Norfolk, England, Johns and Potter 1983, 91–92, no. 16 and see above no. 3.

The significance of the frog in art is uncertain but perhaps it had a chthonic significance; frogs are creatures which emerge from the marshy depths of ponds and hence provide the title and the chorus for Aristophanes' comedy about Dionysus entering the underworld in order to bring back a tragic poet to save Athens. They are depicted on some of the bronze hands and votive pottery associated with the Anatolian god Sabazios (Bird 1996). They are also sometimes depicted as free-standing figurines as well as on the lids of seal-boxes, where they have an apotropaic function (see Drury and Wickenden 1982, especially 241–242, fig. 1,3 and pl. 18,3). It is possible that this ring belonged to a devotee of Sabazios.

Interestingly, there is malleted border decoration noticeable in two places as a series of dots. This was usually applied to Roman coins rather than gems, which might indicate that the inspiration was taken from local coinage.

Comparanda. Schlüter, Platz-Horster, Zazoff 1975, *Hannover*, no. 1714; Maaskant-Kleibrink 1978, nos. 568 and 569; Vitellozzi 2010, no. 433. This was the signet device employed by Maecenas (Plin. *Nat.* XXXVII, 10).

Dating. Third or fourth century AD.

Ref. Ekin Meriç, Kutbay 2021, 65–67, fig. 10.

No. 7 (figs 8a–b): An inscription reading ΚΑΛΗ ΨΥΧΗ.

Acc. no. 2100.

Red garnet.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 28 November 1977.

Dimensions. H. 5 mm, W. 8 mm, Th. 3 mm, Wg. 0.22 gr.

Description. The inscription reads ΚΑΛΗ ΨΥΧΗ – translated as “beautiful soul”, which suggests that the gem was a present for



Fig. 7a

Fig. 7b



Fig. 7c



Fig. 8a



Fig. 8b

a lover who was considered to possess this quality. The second term ΨΥXH involves an intimate sentiment and was surely a token of affection signifying “(you are) in my thoughts”.

Comparanda. For ΨΥXH, see Schlüter, Platz-Horster, Zazoff 1975, *Hannover*, no. 1667; Vitellozzi 2010, no. 474 (ΨΥXH/KAAH). For a complete description and a restitution of the legend, see Zwierlein-Diehl 1991, no. 1731, 72–73 which provides useful

context and illustrates the same set-up with a portrait and an inscription suggesting it to be a special gift.

Dating. Second-third century AD.

Cameos

No. 8 (fig. 9): Medusa head.



Fig. 9

Acc. no. 2102.

Onyx or glass

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 28 November 1977.

Dimensions. H. 16 mm, W. 14 mm, Th. 5 mm, Wg. 1.54 gr.

Description. Usual frontal Medusa depiction.

Comparanda. The head of Medusa is a very common subject indeed for cameos. Middleton 2001, 55, no. 31 represents a similar example acquired in Giresun (ancient Cerasus);

Middleton 1998, 64–65, no. 52, from Nazareth, Galilee; Henig, Whiting 1987, nos. 407–409 from Umm Qeis (Gadara). For the type in general see Henig, Molesworth 2018, 183–192.

Dating. Third century AD, if not a counterfeit dated to the mid-20th century.

No. 9 (fig. 10): Facing male bust.



Fig. 10

Acc. no. 1801.

Dark blue glass.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 14 April 1975.

Dimensions. H. 13 mm, W. 9 mm, Wg. 0.81 gr.

Description. A frontal bust of a youth with hair curling over the brows, moulded in blue glass.

Comparanda. Nardelli 2011, 109, no. 235 from Tilurnum in Dalmatia is virtually identical; also note no. 234 in black glass which is similar. Also cf. Aubry 2011, 239, pl. 4 (solidus of Theodosius II) and pl. 5

(a garnet intaglio depicting Theodosius II), as the curls over the brows on these two facing portraits are the same as on no. 9.

Dating. Bruna Nardelli suggests a date as late as the fifth century AD, citing coins showing facing portraits of the Late Western Emperor, Julius Nepos, who has similar curls as confirmed by the intaglio and coin of Theodosius II discussed by Sébastien Aubry.

Gold finger-rings set with non-engraved gems

No. 10 (figs 11a–b)

Acc. no. 1258.

The bezel contains a convex carnelian which is not engraved.

Provenance. Confiscated by the İznik Court of First Instance on 30 January 1973.

Dimensions. Diam. 16 mm, H. of gem 5 mm, W. of gem 5 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 2.9 gr.

Description. The ring is a concave band of gold, rising on each side, edged by pellets. The attached bezel has attached gold wires, rising to serpent heads on one side of the bezel, though the ends of the wires on the other side are crushed. Serpents were regarded as apotropaic creatures in Greece and Egypt.

Comparanda. Marshall 1907, 126 and pl. 20, no. 771 from Alexandria; Chadour 1994, 35, no. 15.

Dating. Second to first century BC.



Fig. 11a

Fig. 11b

No. 11 (figs 12a–b)

Acc. no. 2622.

Navy blue glass, imitative of lapis lazuli set in a gold finger-ring.

Provenance. Found during the construction of a football field in Elbeyli-Karşıbayır, which is 7 km north of Nicaea.

Dimensions. Diam. 14 mm, H. 6 mm, W. 8 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 2.05 gr.

Description. The gold ring rises to a deep bezel containing the setting.

Comparanda. This is the typical Late Hellenistic ring form, comparable to Marshall 1907, 121, no. 725; Chadour 1994, 45–46, nos. 142–143; Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 25, nos. 81–85.

Dating. First century BC.



Fig. 12a

Fig. 12b

No. 12 (figs 13a–b)



Fig. 13a



Fig. 13b

Acc. no. 2306.

Reddish carnelian.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 15 August 1980.

Dimensions. Diam. 24 mm, H. 6 mm, W. 9 mm, Th. 3 mm, Wg. 2 gr.

Description. A hollow gold ring containing a cream-coloured filler visible through a small break. The hoop has an ovoid section, with slightly everted shoulders, expanding towards the bezel, which contains an ovoid convex garnet.

Comparanda. Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 30–31, nos. 130 and 131, both set with garnets, the second of similar shape. See also d’Ambrosio, De Carolis 1997, 41, no. 78 a hollow gold ring likewise set with a garnet, from Pompeii and 100–101, nos. 320 set with an emerald and 326 set with an amethyst, from Herculaneum.

Dating. First century AD.

No. 13 (figs 14a–b)



Fig. 14a



Fig. 14b

Acc. no. 2237.

Red-violet garnet.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 11 October 1978.

Dimensions. Diam. 14 mm, H. 4 mm, W. 6 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 1.95 gr.

Description. A gold ring, ovoid like the last

entry although the hoop is less rounded; it is likewise set with a convex, oval garnet.

Comparanda. As no. 12 above.

Dating. First century AD.

No. 14 (figs 15a–c)



Fig. 15a



Fig. 15b

Acc. no. 5173, excavation acc. no. iHN’19, find no. 3.

A gold finger-ring set with a red glass setting, a simple band, with a circular box bezel and sides.

Provenance. Excavated on 30 September 2019 from the vaulted burial chamber O-13/14 in the

Hisardere necropolis, discovered (along with entry 6) at an elevation of 96.71 m.

Dimensions. Diam. 21 mm, H. 6.9 mm, W. 7 mm.

Description. The hoop of the ring is a simple band, on which a circular box bezel is mounted, its sides bevelled downwards onto the surface of the hoop.

Comparanda. For the ring see entry 3 and especially entry 6 above from the same context; Deppert-Lippitz 1985, 33, no. 149; see also Chadour 1994, 128, no. 439 with rectangular bezel.

Dating. Third century AD.

Ref. Ekin Meriç, Kutbay 2021, 65–67, fig. 11.



Fig. 15c

3. Catalogue of other jewellery – Gold finger-rings and ring-settings with stamped or engraved decoration

No. 15 (figs 16a–b): Gold ring with near circular bezel showing a pair of cornucopiae.

Acc. no. 3868; excavation acc. no. İED 2001/15.

Provenance. Excavated from a burial chamber in Elbeyli-Dörttepel, a necropolis site 7 km north of Nicaea, and found within the shaft soil on the floor.

Dimensions. W. 17 mm, Th. 2 mm, Wg. 10.3 gr.

Description. Gold ring with near circular bezel engraved with a pair of cornucopiae, flanking a central motif, probably a symbol of the goddess Isis.

Comparanda. For a similar engraved gold ring of this type, see Gerring 2000, 164, no. 13/14, fig. 108. For the central device, cf. Gerring 2000, 165, no. 13/16, fig. 109. For opposed cornucopiae flanking other symbols of prosperity see the intaglios, Zwierlein-Diehl 1991, nos. 2026–2027 and 2031; Henig 2007, no. 422.

Dating. First century BC.



Fig. 16a



Fig. 16b

No. 16 (figs 17a–b): Gold ring setting depicting a figure of Harpocrates in relief.

Acc. no. 1915.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 20 February 1976.

Dimensions. H. 16 mm, W. 12 mm, Th. 1 mm, Wg. 0.90 gr.

Description. The ellipsoid ring setting depicts Harpocrates standing on a low base, his body is nude apart from his Egyptian head-dress and the nebris hanging from his shoulder, slightly curved to the left. He has long locks. In his left hand he holds a cornucopia and in his right a phiale from which he pours a libation on an altar. This is a characteristic image of the Graeco-Egyptian deity except that he



Fig. 17a



Fig. 17b

would normally hold a finger of his right hand to his mouth in a gesture commanding silence.

Comparanda. Harpocrates was widely venerated beyond Egypt and appears on numerous intaglios, though generally with his right hand raised to his lips, as in Middleton 1991, 84, no. 128, from Epidaurum, Dalmatia and Guiraud 1988, 129, no. 382, from southern Gaul. Pliny (*Nat. XXXIII* 41) writes that men were beginning to wear images of Harpocrates on their fingers. Pendants in the form of figures of Harpocrates in the round are also widespread, cf. Lunsingh Scheurleer 1996.

Repoussé plaques of gold like the present example, would, like cameos, have been set in rings for their decorative or protective value. The rings might be either of gold, as in Marshall 1907, no. 258 and Johns 1991, 51, no. 6 or of silver as in Johns 1991, 61–62, no. 18 providing a striking colour contrast. These are both dated to the second century AD, but note similar relief settings on armillae from Oplontis, cf. d’Ambrosio, De Carolis 1997, 67, nos. 200 and 201, though none of these depict Harpocrates.

Dating. First or second century AD.

No. 17 (figs 18a–b): Gold finger-ring, the bezel engraved with a palm branch.



Fig. 18a



Fig. 18b

Acc. no. 1913.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 2 February 1976.

Dimensions. Diam. 14 mm, Th. 3 mm, Wg. 0.70 gr.

Description. A gold finger-ring consisting of a flat band of gold widening to an ovoid bezel on which a palm branch is engraved as a symbol of victory either in real life, whatever the struggle was, or else in the afterlife.

Comparanda. This is a common device, as in Chadour 1994, nos. 178–179; Henig 2007, nos. 768–771.

Dating. Probably second century AD.

No. 18 (figs 19a–b): Gold counterfeit finger-ring



Fig. 19a



Fig. 19b

Acc. no. 1562.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 29 May 1968.

Dimensions. Diam. 26 mm, max. Th. 5 mm, Wg. 5.4 gr.

Description. The hoop is in the form of a snake curled round on itself twice; the head has two depressions that were once filled to represent

eyes, and a pointed snout. Attempts have been made to engrave the body of the serpent to suggest scaling.

Comparanda. Serpent rings were relatively common in the Hellenistic and Roman period. This example is similar to Chadour 1994, nos. 120 and 247, both of which also have a single head; however, this ring is probably counterfeit.

Dating. Probably mid-20th century, as the chiselling technique is ridiculous, and the eyes and other incised details are crafted incorrectly.

4. Catalogue of glass finger-rings

The tradition of glass finger-rings started in Egypt in the mid-fourth century BC, where some examples were inscribed with hieroglyphics. In Roman times glass finger-rings were generally quite plain, monochrome, and of simple workmanship. A small medallion-like space was frequently created in the middle of the front faces of these rings, into which a fake glass stone or a real gem was inserted. Between the first century BC and first century AD glass imitations of gold rings were popular in Roman glassmaking. Eva Marianne Stern argues that glass bracelets and finger-rings related to real life and were not simply created for use in burials (Stern 2001, 358). In the fourth century AD, plain rings were replaced by more carefully crafted jewellery. In a glass workshop near Trier, several examples of this type of ring set with inlaid stones on their bezels were found (Arbmann 1942, 90).

Glass rings, like bracelets, were worn by both men and women. Because glass finger-rings generally have very small diameters, they were mostly worn by young girls or children (Stern 2001, 357).

Although there are quite a number of glass finger-rings in Frederick Henry Marshall's catalogue of the finger-rings held in the British Museum which are reported as "from Smyrna" (1907, nos. 1561–1598 and nos. 1573–1574 with Medusa masks), very few glass rings are known from Turkey. So far only two sites, i.e. Amorium in Phrygia and St Nicholas Church in Myra-Lycia have reported the discovery of glass finger-rings from excavated contexts (cf. Lightfoot 2005, 181; and Çömezoğlu 2007, 345). Chris S. Lightfoot discovered a small number of glass finger-rings during the Amorium excavations, where they were evidently much less common than glass bracelets; however, the methods employed in their production were similar and Lightfoot, therefore, assumes they were made by the same glass masters (Lightfoot 2005, 181).

No. 19 (figs 20a–b)



Fig. 20a



Fig. 20b

Acc. no. 1600.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 16 July 1974.

Dimensions. Diam. 21 mm, H. 8 mm, W. 7 mm, Th. 4 mm, Wg. 2.56 gr.

Description. A hoop of black glass rising to everted shoulders on each side of the central bezel, which contains a setting of white glass.

Comparanda. Chadour 1994, no. 327 with a central glass “jewel” and no. 331 with a central glass Medusa cameo; Guiraud 1988, nos. 1014–1015.

Dating. Second or third century AD.

No. 20 (figs 21a–b)



Fig. 21a



Fig. 21b

Acc. no. 1203.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 22 June 1972.

Dimensions. Diam. 23 mm, H. 6 mm, W. 6 mm, Th. 3 mm, Wg. 2.14 gr.

Description. A double hoop of black glass, with a dark coloured “jewel” in the centre of the bezel within a white band, surrounded by a collet consisting of a raised black band of the same colour as the body of the ring.

Comparanda. Cf. a glass ring with a double hoop or central groove illustrated by Marshall 1907, pl. 34, no. 1592, from Athens.

Dating. Second or third century AD.

No. 21 (figs 22a–b)



Fig. 22a



Fig. 22b

Acc. no. 1599.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek on 29 May 1968.

Dimensions. Diam. 20 mm, H. 6 mm, W. 5 mm, Th. 4 mm, Wg. 2.2 gr.

Description. The hoop of yellowish glass is circular in section and patterned with transverse lines. Its bezel is an applied circular “jewel” of orange glass surrounded by a yellow collet.

Comparanda. This is exactly the same type as in Konuk, Arslan 2000, no. 194 except that the central jewel in that case is blue. Similar examples appear in Chadour 1994, no. 329; Marshall 1907, no. 1578, from Orvieto in Italy.

Dating. Second or third century AD.

No. 22 (figs 23a–b)

Acc. no. 1598.

Provenance. Acquired from Mrs M. Altınölçek.

Dimensions. Diam. 23 mm, H. 7 mm, W. 8 mm, Th. 5 mm, Wg. 3.28 gr.

Description. Very similar to the last entry but paler and likewise patterned with transverse lines, in this

instance blue and yellow. Its bezel is raised above the surface of the hoop by a prominent white band, in the centre of which is an a circular yellow “jewel”.

Comparanda. This is exactly the same type as no. 21; also comparable to Chadour 1994, no. 329; Marshall 1907, no. 1578, from Orvieto in Italy.

As nos. 21 and 22 are paralleled with Konuk and Arslan 2000, no. 194 in the Archaeological and Art Museum of Erimtan in Ankara, it is suggested that these three glass finger-rings from Nicaea and Ankara were produced by a local workshop somewhere in Asia Minor.

Dating. Second or third century AD.



Fig. 23a

Fig. 23b

Acknowledgements

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